

SUBJECTS OF FEELING:
THE POLITICS AND FORM OF SENTIMENTAL FICTION

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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January 2013

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Cornell University 2013

Over the course of the long eighteenth century, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Mary Shelley transformed the art of the novel in order to promote new forms of sympathetic identification. Nevertheless, their works have been read as expressions of a desire to ridicule the presumptive politics of sentimentality—whether through depictions of over-indulgent introspection, disconnected observation, or physical and sensory incapacity. My project, *Subjects of Feeling*, addresses these issues only to assign the eighteenth-century sentimental novel an unarticulated political purpose. I argue that the supposed artificiality of sentimental narratives—precisely the qualities that lead to charges of their being too theatrical, bathetic, digressive, out of proportion, and unnatural—is not a sign of their failure to be politically transformative, nor a symptom of ideological critique. Against the critical assumption that social connection requires literary practices associated with realism (correspondence, resemblance, and mimesis), my readings demonstrate that it is precisely the refusal to fully naturalize or authenticate objects of representation that allows sentimental narratives to reconfigure who can be seen as a “natural” subject of feeling—and thus as a subject of politics. The formal configurations of eighteenth-century sentimental literature, I argue,

embody the “silent” passage from a representative regime of art concerned with roles and genres to the Romantic expressive regime where anybody can become a subject.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephanie DeGooyer was born in Oshawa, a city in the Canadian province of Ontario. She received her B.A in English Literature with Honors from the University of Ottawa in May 2004 and an M.A in English Literature from the University of Toronto in 2006. She then joined the Ph.D. program in English Language and Literature at Cornell University, from which she received a second M.A. in May 2008 and her Ph.D. in January 2013.

Johan William DeGooyer

“a record for the future...”

in memoriam

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been interested in the politics of sentimentalism and sympathy throughout much of my academic life. The ideas pursued in this dissertation owe their existence to the support of many people. At the University of Toronto, Mary Nyquist and Michael Cobb were the first teachers to help me think about the aesthetics of suffering in profoundly new ways. At Cornell, Neil Saccamano's keen sense of an argument pushed me to further refine my ideas and deepen their philosophical connections. Rick Bogel read my writing with enthusiasm and attention to detail that carried my ideas further, and made my writing better. I am also thankful for Laura Brown's understanding of eighteenth-century literature and for Jonathan Culler's guidance and example in the field of literary criticism. Ian Balfour, who I first met at a Cornell function at MLA in 2008, has made many essential recommendations, academic and otherwise, that have taught me how to be a scholar.

The chapters in this dissertation and related articles received substantial commentary from the members of the Bret de Bary interdisciplinary writing group on Human Rights and Cosmopolitanism, funded by a grant from the Mellon Foundation. My chapter on Shelley's *Frankenstein* benefited significantly from a fellowship in the Wertheim Study at the New York Public Library. At the library, Jay Barksdale and Elizabeth Denlinger helped me to expand my obsession with Shelley's "monster" into a public symposium. Susan Wolfson, in turn, energized my reading of *Frankenstein* with her intellectual engagement and example. And Lynn Festa, whose work I deeply admire, made many influential scholarly recommendations.

At various stages, the Cornell University Sage Scholarship, the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Department of English at Cornell University have supported this research. Beyond this essential support, I owe a special debt to Christopher Trigg, whose commentary was integral at every stage of writing, and who was my editing “angel” at the 11th hour. I would also like to express gratitude to Cecily Swanson for her wit and wisdom, which kept me going through many a cold Ithaca winter (and, more amazingly, got me inside the Bibliothèque nationale de France), and to Kelly Pratt for walking me up the hill to school on many a morning. Finally, I thank my sister Genevieve Vorstenbosch, who has never read a word of anything here, and perhaps never will, but without her unconditional love and strength it would not have been possible. This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of our father, who encouraged us to “stay in school” without thinking of the consequences.

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Introduction: “Affecting Words”

When words which have been generally so applied are put together without any rational view, or in such a manner that they do not rightfully agree with each other, the style is called bombast. And it requires in several cases much good sense and experience to be guarded against the force of such language; for when propriety is neglected, a greater number of these affecting words may be taken into the service, and a greater variety may be indulged in combining them.

—Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful*

In *Surprised by Sympathy*, David Marshall mixes metaphors of theater and reading to underline the dangers of sentimentality: “[t]he person who is viewed as a spectacle risks being misinterpreted, misread, mistranslated and mistaken.” Switching midcourse from the violence of “viewing” a person as a spectacle to the more passive failure to read him correctly in language, Marshall’s understanding of the risks of sentimentalism is muddled. How, we ask, can “viewing” a person as a “spectacle” amount to the same thing as misinterpreting him in language? How do we “misread” what we are in fact “seeing?” Is the problem of sentimentality, then, that it insists on the sight of something in a person that that person does not in fact possess? Does this mean that Marshall is ultimately suggesting that there is a correct way to “see” a person, or that sentimental reading and writing insists on—or “risks”—a wrong way of seeing?

These questions are at the heart of this study, but in asking them I am guided less by the negativity suggested in Marshall’s use of the word “risk” than by a desire to prove that the “risks” of sentimentality have positive and unaccounted for consequences.

Whereas Marshall is concerned with sympathy as a problem of correspondence—with what happens when our feelings *fail* to represent the scene that inspires them—I am interested in the political “scene” that comes into view when we try to render what we feel in language. Sentimentality is about seeing, I will suggest, but a rhetorical way of

seeing rather than a visual one— “seeing” in the sense of understanding something new, a concept or a new vision of community, rather than the capacity to take in a scene and instantaneously recognize its contents. As I will show, the sentimental can be thought of as “unsightly” in a doubly significant sense. Its aesthetic is disorderly and disproportionate in comparison with the neat mimesis of realism, which is to say we are not able to instantaneously recognize its contents and are thus forced to contend with foreign feelings and objects. And, more simply, the sentimental forces us to “see” the spectacle of our feelings through the blindness of language.

Before establishing the possibility of a politics of sentimentality, the term sentimentalism must be firmly distinguished from sympathy. These terms are often used as synonyms without any regard for their different etymological and philosophical histories. Where the latter denotes an affect felt in the body for other bodies (a “feeling-with”), the former marks the rhetorical possibilities that are facilitated when we take distance from our own bodies in language. In other words, sympathy is the feeling we have for others; sentimentality is the formal features that direct us to these feelings.¹ Sentimentality is therefore not fundamentally concerned with the empirical content of feelings. It is, instead, a rhetorical logic—a means of reframing the ways in which people have been traditionally identified as worthy subjects of feeling. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle established that the genres of comedy and tragedy characterize two types of people: comedic or low characters, to whom we owe our laughter and scorn, and higher born

¹ John Mullan and Lynn Festa distinguish between sympathy and sentimentalism by emphasizing the textual form of sentimentalism. Mullan argues that sentimentalism is the representation and rhetoric of the physical capacity for emotional responsiveness: “[it is] a type of text, [which] promised an occasion for fine feeling.” (*Sentimental Novels*, 238). Festa, for her part, argues that “unlike sensibility (which designates the susceptibility or sensitivity of a particular individual and is a quality of a subject), and ... sympathy (which involves the capacity to feel for or empathize with another and is an interpersonal relation), sentimentality

persons to whom we cannot help but give our pity and praise. Aristotle's designation of feeling in these genres has nothing to do with instinct or nature; instead his affective assignments follow long-established poetic principles of propriety. The sentimental genre is important because it mucks up these assignments, producing texts that manipulate or confuse readers into identifying with characters whom they have been taught to reject. It is to the very openness of the sentimental text, and its potentially estranging effects, that I look to chart its political advantages, linking authors such as Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne and Mary Shelley to a form of writing that suppresses any hierarchy between worthy and unworthy subjects of feeling, thereby producing new visions of social community.

In common contemporary usage, "sentimental" has a negative connotation. As Michael Bell observes, sentimentality was once "one of the most honorific terms in Enlightenment vocabulary," a sub-discourse that made feeling, rather than reason, the basis of morality. Today, it has taken on a pejorative quality, becoming "a term of near abuse referring to ... self-indulgent and actively pernicious modes of feeling" (2). We label something sentimental when we perceive that it expresses an emotion "too mawkish" or too "willfully simple" for the situation at hand. When an older woman complains that her neighborhood has lost touch with the family values of her youth, ignoring key racial and class tensions in the process, her reminiscence is sentimental. When a politician refers to "honest, hardworking families" to bolster his approval ratings with the working-class demographic, his appeal is manipulatively sentimental. The only exception to this tendency towards negativity may be the term "sentimental value," the idea of investing deeply personal, rather than general significance, in an object that

functions outside of the exchange market. But even this idea is often viewed critically, as it suggests a privatized conception of worth.

As a literary genre, sentimentality has scarcely fared better than the word from which it takes its name. Critics, adhering to the protocols of realism or to earlier, Aristotelian conceptions of representation, tend to dismiss sentimental novels as ridiculous, bathetic, “campy,” narcissistic, and performative.² My argument, however, is that the political potential of eighteenth-century sentimental novels is to be found precisely in their compromised formal structures: the way they fall short of the ideals of realism, and stumble, often unwittingly, into the domain of comedy.³ By opposing sentimentalism to “realism,” I want to, on the one hand, situate it in relation to romance (also a precursor of the realist novel), and on the other, to position sentimentalism against the dominant history of the novel (the push for the authenticity of the “I” and veracity of historical narration). Sentimentalism, I argue, enacts a drive towards another representation, not of reality (like it “is”), but of the codes by which we have constituted the appearance of reality. The very “badness” of the sentimental text is an important formal quality for me. When the sentimental fails, it fails productively.

² By realism, I am referring to the drive for “imitative prose fiction,” for verisimilitude and a history-like appearance, which negated “romance” in the seventeenth century in order to uphold “empirical standards of veracity” (McKeon, xxii). As McKeon points out, “realism gathers up and sophisticates the scattered threads of verisimilitude and probability that Renaissance writers had teased out of the *Poetics*” (120). The modern sense of realism and Aristotle’s much earlier doctrine of imitation cannot, of course, be so easily equated. See McKeon’s chapter “The Destabilization of Generic Categories,” in *The Origins of the English Novel* for a discussion of how Aristotle’s category of poetry (and the Renaissance rediscovery of the *Poetics*) excluded prose narrative.

³ By opposing sentimentalism to “realism,” I want to, on the one hand, situate it in relation to romance (also a precursor of the realist novel), and on the other, to position sentimentalism against the dominant history of the novel (the push for the authenticity of the “I” and veracity of historical narration). Sentimentalism, I argue, enacts a drive towards another representation, not of reality (like it “is”), but of the codes by which we have constituted the appearance of reality.

In new readings of Adam Smith, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, and Mary Shelley, my project suggests that the supposed artificiality of sentimental narratives—the qualities that lead to charges of their being too formulaic, theatrical, bathetic, digressive, out of proportion and indirect—is not a sign of their failure to be politically transformative, nor a symptom of satire or ideological critique. Against the opinion that sympathetic identification requires literary practices associated with realism (correspondence, resemblance, and mimesis), I argue that it is precisely the refusal to fully naturalize or authenticate objects of representation that allows sentimental narratives to reconfigure who can be seen as a subject of feeling—and thus as a subject of politics. Sentimentalism does not reproduce, in Adam Smith’s famous phrase, what readers are already “willing to go along with” in their imagination. Instead, it forges new political and social connections by exposing as arbitrary the classical generic boundaries that designate who can display affect and who can elicit it. In each chapter, I insist on the necessity of immanent readings that engage directly with the words on offer in a particular novel. But this does not mean that the texts I consult are the only ones that might have been selected. I have chosen to read Shelley, Sterne and Richardson because, in many ways, their sentimental novels are the most well-known and established critiques of sentimentality itself. In reversing our readings of canonical sentimental novels, I want to show where we might begin to see new potential in what has been roundly dismissed as “bad” form. When Sterne, for example, describing the piteous call for help from a caged bird, tells us that its “notes” were “mechanical ... yet so true in tune to nature” (*A Sentimental Journey*), or Richardson, ventriloquizing the voice of a young domestic, opines that “the soul of [a] servant is of equal worth to that of a princess” (*Pamela*), or

when Mary Shelley's hideous monster calmly makes the distinction that, "French is the only language that I speak, but I am not a Frenchman" (*Frankenstein*), we see how these novels articulate deeply political questions about what it means to be a subject of feeling by re-envisioning what can be seen, heard, and read in language.

I am by no means alone in detecting the cultural and political significance of sentimentality. Ever since the publication of R. F. Brissenden's *Virtue in Distress* (1974), the socio-historical significance of sentiment (particularly its gendering) has sparked intense critical interest in the genre. The most influential general studies on the subject remain J.G. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* (1996), Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), and Ann Jessie Van Sant's *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (1993). Generally speaking, scholars interested in the political or ideological function of sentimental literature have bypassed considerations of aesthetic form in their attempt to recover the social and historical foundations of a given text. Studies of sentimentalism proliferated in the 1980s as part of the New Historicist and Marxist critique of formalism and New Criticism. The study of poetic form, these critics alleged, ignored wider social and political forces that determine the production of literature. Markman Ellis' *The Politics of Sensibility* (1996) extended this critical approach, arguing that the sentimental novel "consciously" participated in debates about the abolition of slavery and the movement for the reformation of prostitutes. It is within this socio-political debate about sentimentality, specifically the question of where we might locate a conscious (or unconscious) politics of sentimentality, that I situate my work. Many scholars, for example, have noted that popular eighteenth-century sentimental novels are historically and ideologically entwined

with the making of the middle class. Robert Markley makes the case that sentimental feelings are the bourgeois' compensation for the aristocratic status he lacks in his person. John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1998) argues that sentimentalism is a privatizing discourse that makes men of feeling into "exceptional connoisseurs." In *Trouble With Strangers* (2009), Terry Eagleton offers an updated take on the narcissistic tendencies of sentimentalism. While he acknowledges that it is a key precursor of the concept of the "imaginary" in phenomenology and psychoanalysis, sentimentality remains for Eagleton a "luxurious ethics." I contest the received opinion that sentimental novels are forms of ideology or passive reflections of history that once did cultural work but are now little more than unpleasurable reads (especially for the unlucky scholar who must still trudge through them).

Rather than critique the "homogenizing work" of its aesthetic ideology, I valorize the capacity of sentimentalism to forge new relationships between bodies and words. Through formal literary analysis, I locate the connection between sentimental novels and the intellectual concept of political equality in the way that these writings displace and re-frame social reality by deliberately displaying the fictional nature of our social constructions. The political value of sentimentality lies in its ability, as a failed form, to render the arbitrary boundaries and divisions of feelings perceptible. As a result, it is a less a phenomenon for historical study than a methodological analytic fitted for a variety of eighteenth-century issues, including colonialism, slavery, epistemology, humanitarianism, empiricism, alterity, society, and public opinion. My implication of sentimental narratives with a politics of form that cuts against the grain of ideology is

greatly informed by the insights of Jacques Rancière. The “politics of literature” is a term he often uses to demonstrate how “literature does politics simply by being literature” (3). The politics of a given text are not located in what its author says, or in the political commitments he or she is known to have. The “politics of literature” may be found, instead, in the way the text rearranges what Rancière calls “the partition of the perceptible” or the “division of the sensible.” As he suggests,

the expression ‘politics of literature’ thereby implies that literature intervenes as literature in this carving up of space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise. It intervenes in the relationship between practices and forms of visibility and modes of saying that carves [sic.] up one or more common worlds. (*Politics of Literature*, 4)

In *Mute Speech*, Rancière describes the political transformation from the representative tradition of belle-lettres in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century to the aesthetic regime of the Romantic era in which anybody could be a subject of art. For him, literature and democracy both disrupt ordered hierarchies and the relationships between discourses and bodies. Thus, what they share is a similar *process* rather than content. Though Rancière is himself more interested in Flaubert and Mallarmé, the eighteenth-century sentimental novel forms part of the “silent revolution” that he describes, insofar as it also re-distributes the forms through which the subjects are perceived, and so makes what he would call “a partition in the perceptible.” To Rancière’s claim that the literary passage to the Romantic aesthetic regime entailed a reconfiguring of the limits of what can be seen and said, my project reveals that this passage also entailed a re-parceling of the divisions of what could be “felt,” hence my title, *Subjects of Feeling*.

My first chapter, “Seeing is Conceiving,” addresses the way that eighteenth-century philosophers and aestheticians conceived of the relationship between sympathetic

identification and the empirical spectacle of theatre. Focusing on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I show how empirical accounts of sympathy ground their theories of passionate association in certain cultural authorities. Emphasizing the many inconsistencies in his theatrical conception of morality, this chapter complicates Smith's claim that sympathy works best with persons who are local and familiar—with brothers, friends and fellow-citizens—and with higher-born subjects. If, as Smith admits in a few places, a spectator of suffering cannot know the distress of any person without becoming "impersonal" to himself, then the requirement that the spectator first be able to recognize a subject of sympathy is disqualified. The only thing preventing Smith's spectator from getting lost in the experiences of a horde of anonymous others is the arbitrary authority of custom, which Smith personifies as the "man within the breast." The novels I discuss in the following chapters explicitly foreground this arbitrary theory of sympathy in their forms, challenging readers to see new, rather than customary, social and political arrangements.

In my second chapter, "Naturalizing Nature in Richardson's *Pamela*," I show how Richardson's characteristic epistolary method of "writing to the moment" exploits the resources of the burgeoning eighteenth-century print market to challenge the restrictions of space and time that Smith, following classical authorities, puts on the sympathetic imagination. The familiar letter works against Smith's parochialism not by modifying the way the spectator witnesses or responds to representations of suffering in the novel, but by changing the sphere in which the spectator might be thought to have commitment and investment. In my reading, Richardson overcomes Smith's division between the personal and impersonal by emphasizing the material substance of Pamela's body as a new form

of abstract historical truth. Where tragic theater communicates emotion visually and orally, Pamela's letters mediate her relationship to the public sphere by way of what Condorcet calls "publicity without proximity, a community without a visible presence." I suggest that this means of operating personally across distance allows Pamela to defy her aristocratic seducer's plot to keep her suffering a matter of private interest. I conclude, however, by suggesting that the novel's usefulness for a vision of feminist politics in the eighteenth century hinges on whether readers accept Henry Fielding's opinion that the ending of the plot, which sees Pamela's virtue rewarded with a socially advancing marriage, repurposes the novel with a didactic function.

My third chapter, "Jesting in Earnest: Sterne's Sentimental Passport" situates Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* within late eighteenth-century debates about the relationship between sentimentality and comedy. I argue that Yorick's enthusiastic professions of feeling for odd objects—a cypress in the desert, an abandoned stagecoach—are part of a serious re-negotiation of the limits of the sympathetic imagination. In texts such as Sterne's, where the protagonist is a traveler encountering a wide variety of people in a foreign sphere, the task of the sentimental is to create relationships among persons who have no identifiable narrative or national prehistory. The significance of this calling is underlined by the novel's plot, which, as few critics have noticed, concerns an illegal traveler attempting to evade the French police. I uncover how Sterne's novel takes up the late Restoration dramatic tradition of blending pathos and comedy and enlarges its political dimension by initially focusing on the Droits d'aubaine, "the laws over strangers." In stubbornly clinging to an ideal of benevolence that critics have often seen as dishonest or ridiculous, Yorick makes an imaginative effort

to enclose experiences that readers of realism have been taught to hold apart or leave puzzlingly unconnected and open—a point I highlight at the end of the chapter in a reading of Yorick’s comedic use of Hamlet as a legal passport in France.

In my final chapter, ““Changing the Subject:’ Sympathy and the Monstrous Form of *Frankenstein*,” I turn to the status of sentimentality in the Romantic period, focusing on narrative accounts of the “monstrosity” of feeling and the relationship between sentimentality and the aesthetic experience of the sublime. In my exploration of the novel’s framing epistolary structure, I demonstrate how this form, which features an English sea captain translating the tales of the novel’s two principal characters for his sister, unwittingly provides a means of connecting the physically hideous creature with human sympathy. While post-structuralist critics have read the novel as an allegory of failed public self-assertion, I investigate Shelley’s framing narrative for its ability to stage political connection, not just for women but also for the foreign and exiled persons who also feature prominently in the novel. By narrating the creature in the same language and mode as Victor Frankenstein, Captain Walton integrates into history a monstrous figure who could not be assimilated into a framework based on pictorial representation. In the process of telling a cautionary story about a scientist’s unnatural creation, Shelley also demonstrates how an art form might make intelligible the very creation it would deem too horrible for representation in its own story.

The novels of Richardson, Sterne and Shelley provide the ideal grounds for a critique of the traditional construction of sentimentality as either a mystifying ideological surface or an authentic display of interiority. My project reveals that the eccentricities of the sentimental genre in the eighteenth century do not support the vision of a conservative

bourgeois politics. To the degree that sentimental narratives generate a sometimes clumsy conjunction of different genres and narrative modes, they rearrange the generic boundaries of who or what can be rightfully thought of as an “authentic” subject of feeling in the eighteenth-century political world. I argue that the wider basis of sentimental feelings and the novels that gave these feelings narrative shape, was a particular kind of exaggerated and imaginative performance that undid older boundaries and hierarchies of order. Through sentimentality, the emotional and representational upheavals of the late eighteenth century are foregrounded in print.

1. Seeing is Conceiving: Smith's Novelistic Imagination

A man must be, in some measure, acquainted with the philosophy of vision, before he can be thoroughly convinced how little those distant objects would appear to the eye, if the imagination, from a knowledge of their real magnitudes, did not swell and dilate them.

—Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

I would like to begin this study of the political implications of sentimentality by returning to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). I begin with Smith not because I want to provide a philosophical explanation for the literary works featured in the chapters that follow, but rather because Smith, in the words of James Chandler, offers an "aestheticized view of social circulation," basing his theory of sympathy on the leveling power of the imagination rather than on the empirical senses (21). Detailing the process by which individuals become unabsorbed from their own limited perspective in order to "see" themselves and others from a third-person perspective, Smith's theory of sympathy poses the question of whether there can be a true "correspondence" between ourselves and others. This is a fundamentally political question because it concerns the possibility of equality between "unequally" perceived persons. Yet it is also a literary question insofar as it implies that the formation of social communities is an inherently fictional process.

But what kind of fictional process is Smith's theory of sympathy? Many commentators have pointed out that Smith's account of sympathy functions as a metaphor of the theatre. Literary critics, political scientists, and sociologists from Jonas Barish (1981) to David Marshall (1986), Luc Boltanski (1993) and Charles Griswold (1999), to mention only a few directly interested in Smith, (and leaving aside the

metaphor in Hume and others) have pointed out the associations between sympathy and theatrical representation.⁴ Griswold, for example, notes the opening comparison in the *TMS* of human life to spectacles represented in plays.⁵ He also comments on Smith's preference for the word "actor" instead of "agent," suggesting that Smith uses theatrical vocabulary in order to introduce a certain perspectival innovation into moral theory, namely that we learn to act morally by balancing a view of ourselves with a view of how others would view us if they were members of our audience:

The simile of the theater is helpful in characterizing what Smith thinks becomes visible from a detached philosophical point of view... The critic's objectivity is not that of an external spectator completely outside the theater (one looking through the window, as it were). Smith's theorizing critic also sits in the theater but with a vantage that allows observation both the *dramatis personae* and the audience. Objectivity is achieved through relative, though not complete, detachment. (68)

Griswold's final sentence here requires careful clarification. Smith's theory of sympathy is not to be taken for granted as merely prescriptive or authoritarian. The critic that Griswold speaks of here is not omniscient. Though Smith is interested in how individuals might approach their own conduct and the conduct of others through the figure he famously refers to as the "impartial spectator," he is not proposing a theory of objective detachment. Smith would prefer to keep individuals subjectively confined to their own experience than risk a theory that would reduce ethical debate to the imposition of outside injunction. The objectivity Griswold speaks of on behalf of Smith is much more

⁴ For a brief overview of the theatrical metaphor of theatre in Descartes, Charleton, Hume, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Burke see Lamb's *The Evolution of Sympathy*, 64-65.

⁵ Griswold notes this passage from Smith in particular: "Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator. Our joy for the deliverance of those heroes of tragedy or romance who interest us, is as sincere for our grief for their distress..." (10).

intersubjective.⁶ Individuals learn to judge their own behavior and the behavior of others by imagining themselves as either actors or audiences for others. For David Marshall, this emphasis on role-playing makes Smith's moral theory quintessentially theatrical because "this condition of constantly imagining ourselves appearing before the eyes of other people inevitably places us in a theatrical relationship to others; but it also creates an internalized sense that determines how we see ourselves, even if we are not in the presence of an actual spectator" (174).

Critics such as Griswold and Marshall are right to emphasize the importance of the metaphor and vocabulary of theatre in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. References to theatrical productions abound in the text, and it is well known that Smith was keenly interested in the theatre.⁷ Moreover, Smith's moral theory focuses on the metaphorical concept of "spectatorship," a concept that—while borrowed from Addison and Steele's *Spectator* papers—has deep theatrical dimensions.⁸ But I would like to begin this chapter by questioning whether the theatrical motif is the best form for understanding the fictional process of the imagination in *TMS*. While the emphasis on theatre and sympathy in Smith's treatise has been much observed, some telling differences between the spectatorship of theatre and the novelistic imagination have gone less remarked. Many critics have made passing mention of other fictional forms such as the novel in their

⁶ "Sensibility and sentimentalism were, so to speak, the eighteenth century's phenomenological turn—the equivalent in the realm of the emotions of that turn to the subject which was Protestant inwardness and possessive individualism..." See Eagleton, *Trouble With Strangers*, 6.

⁷ See David Marshall, "Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments," *Critical Inquiry*, vol 10 (1984) 592-613; Marshall, *The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; and Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy, Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley*, Chicago, 1988.

⁸ As D.D. Raphael notes, Smith borrowed the term 'spectator' from the title of the famous paper *The Spectator*, which inaugurated its publication forty years before Smith published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. D.D. Raphael, "The Impartial Spectator," in A. Skinner and T. Wilson, eds., *Essays on Adam Smith*: The Clarendon Press, 1995, 83-99.

commentaries on Smith, but too often these forms are collapsed alongside theatre under the general umbrella of fiction.⁹ It goes without saying that a play and a novel are distinct but interrelated literary forms.¹⁰ Perhaps less obvious is that, as models for the structural operation of sympathy, the formal differences between plays and novels are suggestive of different political positions as well.

Many critics have argued that the social and political implications of Smith's spectatorial theory of sympathetic identification are "stridently conservative."¹¹ Fonna Forman-Barzilai, for example, argues that Smith's theory of moral sentiments amounts to "little more than an internalization of social norms" (99). The model of the impartial spectator, she suggests, looks more like an early precursor to the Freudian super-ego than an empiricist theory of the senses. Similar arguments, with or without the Freudian touchstone, have also been made for the conservative implications of Smith's politics. Jonathan Lamb argues that Smith's impartial spectator is "a personification of the public gaze, a normative force" (61). Vivasvan Soni argues that *TMS* "becomes a conduct manual, teaching those who suffer how to manage their behavior so that the spectator can sustain the fiction of sentimental communion; it is less interested in sentimental concern for suffering than the regulation of sentiments" (310). And for Dennis Rasmussen there

⁹ One prominent example is found in Martha Nussbaum's reading of Smith in *Poetic Justice*. Addressing the process of reading and ethics in *TMS*, she writes: "What we now should notice is that throughout this discussion Smith uses literary readership (and spectatorship at dramas) to illustrate the stance, and the emotions, of the judicious spectator" (75). Of course, Nussbaum is correct that Smith features references to both literature and drama in his work. But the structure of reading, as I will point out in this chapter, is not as similar to the structure of spectacle.

¹⁰ The novel has its generic roots in the dramatic form, but as Laura Brown remarks: "the rise of the novel defines the decline of drama" (184). Brown takes note of the "crucial differences" between the dramatic and novelistic, namely "psychological complexity and social scope" (186), and the fact that the novel's lack of formal history makes it "exempt from the constraints of a prior history" (190). Laura Brown. *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

¹¹ "Smith's political analysis discovers a clarity of vision as apparently uncommon and implicitly momentary as Hume's philosophical skepticism. ...[] the purpose of the analysis becomes a strident conservatism" (52). Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*.

are many affinities between Rousseau's theory of the "general will" and Smith's impartial spectator.¹² The goal of this chapter, however, is to sharpen our critical understanding of the fictional process inherent in Smith's model of sympathy, in order to change the kind of political critique we are able to derive from his model.

As I will show, as much as Smith's theory organizes itself as a spectatorial politics based on sight and proximity, the text of the treatise itself cannot help, even as it takes pains to avoid, promoting the kinds of conceptualization that take subjects beyond the space-time construction of the playhouse, which is the figure for the epistemological limits of the individual's conceptual world. If we pay attention to the difference between seeing and conceiving in Smith's argument, prioritizing the novelistic mode of "conceiving" over the theatrical emphasis on "seeing," a model of political equality emerges quite different from the disciplinary and normative models to which Smith is often linked and associated. Smith's treatise supports a politics of equality because it concerns the process by which something foreign comes to be understood as similar, if not the same, as the self.¹³ While Smith himself prefers the term "correspondence," I stress the word "equality" to emphasize the way in which sympathy, in Smith's view, actively constructs or creates new relationships, rather than passively reflects or installs older order ones. For now let me simply remark that this process may not be as politically delimiting or abstracting of singularity as has been previously thought.

¹² See Dennis Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith's Response to Rousseau* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State, UP, 2008).

¹³ Though she does not discuss the political aspects of sympathy, in *Strange Fits of Passion* Adela Pinch examines the relationship between David Hume and eighteenth-century literature, arguing the case for "persistent murmurings, in the second half of the eighteenth century, that feelings were getting out of hand" (1). Just as feelings were made to vouchsafe personal identity, Pinch argues that the period had a "concomitant tendency to characterize feelings as transpersonal, as autonomous entities that do not always belong to individuals but rather wander extravagantly from one person to another" (2).

i. sympathy and the senses

“Sympathy is about changing places in fancy” (4). With this statement, Smith lays down the fictional foundation of sympathy, depleting, as he democratizes, its defining characteristics. As he goes on to say, “Sympathy, though its meaning was perhaps, originally the same [as pity and compassion], may now, however, without much propriety, may be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever” (10). By “sympathy” Smith means the sharing and reception of *any* kind of feeling, whether that feeling is painful, grievous, joyful, merciful, or spiteful.¹⁴ “A smiling face” and a “sorrowful countenance” can be the product or occasion of sympathy, just as we can readily sympathize with the “fear and resentment” of a person as much as with the individual who endangers him (11). Smith’s definition of sympathy is more capacious than other eighteenth-century accounts. He identifies the structure of identification (what he calls “fellow-feeling”) through which we understand an action or behavior as having a moral quality, and shows himself to be more interested in our ability to enter into the sentiments of others than in the foundation of any given sentiment.

Smith’s turn toward the form of feeling becomes evident towards the beginning of the final part of *TMS*, where he summarizes two questions that guide his moral theory as a whole:

In treating of the principles of morals there are two questions to be considered. First, wherein does virtue exist? Or what is the tone of temper, and tenour of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praiseworthy character, the character which is the natural object of esteem, honour, and approbation? And, secondly, by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us? Or in other words, how and by what means does it come to pass that the mind prefers one tenour of conduct to another, denominates the one

¹⁴ “References to Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* hereafter will be cited from the Glasgow edition (1974) edited by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie.

right and the other wrong; considers the one as the object of approbation, and reward, and the other of blame, censure, and punishment? (viii.i.2)

As D.D. Raphael notes, Smith does not really attend to the first question articulated here: “wherein does virtue exist?” Towards the end of the treatise he offers a relatively brief discussion of “amicable” and “respectable” virtues, as well as a fairly sustained discussion of the difference between justice and beneficence. But at no point does he “give us an explanation of what is meant by the concept of moral virtue, how it arises, how it differentiates moral excellence from other forms of human excellence” (10). We must surmise, as Raphael does, that the foundations of morality do not really interest Smith. Unlike his Scottish predecessor, Francis Hutcheson, Smith does not present his treatise as a psychological “inquiry” into “original” ethical ideas. His account of sympathy bends more towards sociology, approaching moral judgment by way of an evaluation that explains, without pretending to do so exhaustively, how a spectator might see his or her own behavior from within a particular social context.¹⁵

For example, Smith devises for his readers the hypothetical situation of an encounter with a man on the street whose father has recently passed away. We have never met this man before, and there is nothing about his physical appearance that indicates the cause of his grief. We observe grief in its physical form, but “we could scarce conceive the first movements of concern on his part” (17). The only way we can account for the cause of this man’s distress is to be told of his suffering from a third party. Once this “background” information has been formally received, the physical process of sympathy can truly begin:

Both he and his father, perhaps, are entirely unknown to us, or we happen to employed about other things and do not take time to picture out in our

¹⁵ See Raphael (8-9) for a good elaboration of this point.

imagination the different circumstances of distress which must occur in him. We have learned, however, from experience, that such misfortune naturally excites such a degree of sorrow; and we know that if we took time to consider his situation fully, and in all its parts, we should without doubt most sincerely sympathize with him. (17)

Smith must assert that the sorrow and distress on the anonymous man's face do not incline us to sympathy. Two additional elements are required. We need "time" to "picture" the "different circumstances" that have led to the anonymous man's distress. More importantly, we need prior experience that teaches us how people typically behave when they have lost a family member, allowing us to judge whether the distress we observe is appropriate to its cause: "We have learned, however, from experience, that such a misfortune naturally excites such a degree of sorrow" (17). The conjunction of "time" and "experience" necessary for sympathy in this scenario cancels the view of sympathy as instantaneous or truly mimetic, turning it instead into a system of propriety and aesthetic judgment. Championing context over sensory transmission, Smith explains how our sentiments and the ones we witness in others are performances to be evaluated and judged according to certain criteria we gain from experience. The experience we rely on to judge a scene of sympathy can be personal. But our personal experience must itself comply with the shared experience of others. To illustrate the improper use of experience for sympathetic exchange, Smith offers the example of a forlorn lover. Like Don Quixote for his beloved Dulcinea, the lover's feelings for his love cannot be shared with others, seeming to us "entirely disproportioned to the value of the object" (31). For sympathy to work, the scene that would inspire it must not appear "ridiculous to a third party:"

Even of the passions derived from the imagination, those which take their origin from a peculiar turn or habit it has acquired, though they maybe acknowledged to be perfectly natural, are, however, but little sympathized with. The imaginations of mankind, not having acquired that particular turn, cannot enter into them; and

such passions, though they may be allowed to be unavoidable in some part of their life, are always in some measure ridiculous. This is the case with strong attachment which naturally grows up between two persons of different sexes, who have long fixed their thoughts upon one another. Our imagination not having run in the same channel with that of the lover, we cannot enter into the eagerness of his emotions. (31)

Smith's emphasis on suitable context explains, in part, why he does not truly answer the question, "wherein does virtue consist?" With the example of the anonymous grieving man and the ridiculous lover, Smith puts more emphasis on the second question, "what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us...how and by what means does it come to pass that the mind prefers one tenour of conduct to another?" Sympathy cannot be premised on an instantaneous exchange of emotion between two different bodies because, as the scenario with the man on the street demonstrates, there must be a gap of time separating the spectator who witnesses from the experience of the "person principally concerned." This gap, which Smith figures in the form of a question from a third person, suggests that the use of the word "spectator" is misleading. Sympathy is never based solely on the scene, or stage, in front of us. It requires an understanding of events that have occurred in the past, and it requires understanding facts that cannot be presented as visual spectacle. As we have seen, Smith's so-called spectator does more listening and questioning than he does observing the face or body of the person principally concerned.

At this point, Smith's theory of sympathy requires that we make a certain distinction between "seeing" and "conceiving." In the beginning of the *TMS*, Smith uses the terms pretty much interchangeably: "pity," says Smith, "is the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively

manner” (3). Soon after, however, he uses the verb “to conceive” on its own with more frequency:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we *conceive* ourselves enduring all the same torments. (4)

As we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves, nor *conceive* anything like the passions which it excites. (2)

Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never *conceive*, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned. (22)

Broadly speaking, to conceive means “to take into, or form in, the mind” (OED) or “to form a mental representation or idea of; to form or have a conception or notion of; to think of, imagine” (OED). “To conceive,” of course, also means to create and engender in a womb: it is a physical form of conception as well as an abstract form of reflection. Noting this double meaning, we must not be too quick to downplay the relationship between physical and imaginative forms of conception. Indeed, as Smith himself suggests, a man can sympathize with the pangs of childbirth even if he has never been pregnant. He can conceive childbirth without ever seeing it. If *Tristram Shandy* is a literary source to judge by, few men in the eighteenth century, other than the occasional male midwife, would have witnessed birth. Yet, a man could “conceive” childbirth—as did Tristram in his autobiography—in the imaginary sense. The important distinction to note is highlighted in the second quotation above where Smith uses a metaphor of geographical distance to stress cognitive distance: the ability to “conceive” the passions or sensations of another person requires a point of temporal and aesthetic distance, but it is up for debate whether this point of distance requires a point of physical distance as well.

ii. “what has befallen you?”

The necessity of a temporal and epistemological interval between the actor and a spectator in Smith’s account means that Smith is not exactly a moral-sense theorist. Unlike Francis Hutcheson, his teacher at the University of Glasgow, Smith does not promote or share the idea of a naturally inherent moral sense that instinctively and immediately perceives which actions are to be deemed virtuous and which are to be declared vicious.¹⁶ Disputing Hutcheson’s idea of a spontaneous transfer of emotion—the idea that the passions can be transfused instantaneously without the spectator’s prior knowledge—Smith argues that our feelings cannot travel beyond our own person unless floated by the imagination. While he agrees with other moral sense theorists that individuals are naturally inclined to take an interest in the misfortunes of others, he argues that we are by nature also directed to correct and mediate our passions away from our personal inclinations.¹⁷ His theory of sympathetic imagination thus goes beyond the body-based ethics of the moral sense school, offering a theory of morality that resembles something more like an imaginary ethics.¹⁸ In Smith’s account, the imagination is a force

¹⁶ See Neil Saccamano’s essay “Aesthetically Non-Dwelling: Sympathy, Property and the House of Beauty in Hume’s *Treatise*” for a possible interconnection between Smith and Hume here, especially in this passage from Hume’s *Treatise*: “No passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind. We are only sensible of its causes and effects. From these we infer the passion. And consequently these give rise to our sympathy.” (THM, 3.3.1).

¹⁷ On a comparison between Adam Smith’s moral and economic thinking in this context, see Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 32.

¹⁸ It has recently been argued that when Emmanuel Levinas emphasizes the centrality of the face for an ethics of compassion, he returns, perhaps even rescues, ethics from Kant’s rule-based judgments. To encounter the physical face of the other is to encounter the living presence of another person and, therefore, for Levinas, the “face” is something experienced socially and ethically. Eagleton connects moral sense philosophy and the ethics of Levinas, Derrida and Badiou in his book on ethics, *Trouble with Strangers*. The entire book is conceived as an exploration of ethical theories from Aristotle to Žižek, but Eagleton, an eighteenth-centuryist by trade, spends a considerable amount of time on the British sentimentalists, suggesting, at one point, that “sensibility and sentimentalism were, so to speak, the eighteenth century’s phenomenological turn—the equivalent in the realm of emotions of that turn to the subject which was

that is both limited to the individual spectator and yet transcendent of his physical body and personal experience:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by *conceiving* what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. (emphasis mine 4)

The spectator does not experience the same emotion with the “man on the rack.” As Smith suggests, using pictorial properties of space, “my companion does not naturally look upon the misfortune that has befallen me, or the injury that has been done to me, from the same point of view in which I consider them. They affect me much more nearly” (20). Smith rejects the idea of sympathy as “contagion” or “infection.” Sentiments are not transferred by intuition; instead, moral judgments must be established within the limitations of a contextual sphere, which is formed from gathering a collection of details that may, or may not, apply to the situation in question. Smith is therefore skeptical about the “force of blood” as the basis for identification. This idea, he insists, only exists as a dramatic convention:

In some tragedies and romances, we meet with many beautiful and interesting scenes, founded upon, what is called, ‘the force of blood,’ or upon the wonderful affection which near relations are supposed to conceive for one another, even before they know that they have no connection. The force of blood, however, I am afraid, exists no-where but in tragedies and romances. (222)

For Smith, the idea of a “moral sense” that perceives virtuous behavior in the same way that the physical senses perceive the color red is the stuff of both romance and philosophy. Smith reasons that if nature had desired that a natural sense should govern

Protestant inwardness and possessive individualism” (16). Simon Critchley, in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* (London, 1999), also makes the point that, for Levinas, “subjectivity is founded in sensibility” (189).

and determine moral judgment, then humans would already have a name for this sense and it would not have to be named by Hutcheson or any other philosopher. That Hutcheson had to come up with a name for this natural moral sense can only mean that this sense does not exist by way of nature. Emphasizing the power of representation over the senses, Smith rejects Hutcheson's idea that ethics is oriented in the body, offering instead an elaborate account of where, when, how, and under what circumstances sympathetic relations can be conceived between two or more objects or agents. There is simply no place in his account for an idea of innate moral sense that instinctively and involuntarily guides social conduct.¹⁹ We do not view the misfortunes of others in the same way that we view a play or follow the principles of a "system of philosophy" (20).

Sympathy requires telling details. To understand whether an action is moral or immoral, Smith argues that an inquiry into the circumstances that occasioned it must be made. Contextual inquiries are necessary because no sentiment is forever the same, universally good or bad. There are no generic "types" from which we might immediately recognize appropriate behavior. In the long footnote at the end of Chapter I in Section II, Smith points out that certain sentiments, such as resentment, have the potential to be viewed as either moral or immoral depending on the circumstances which occasion them. Resentment, for example, is among the "most odious" of sentiments, but it also among the "least governable." Knowing that resentment is difficult to avoid, we may applaud a man who tries to temper his feelings without expunging them completely. But in another instance we might complain that a person does not have enough resentment, having "too little sense of the injuries that have been done to him...we are ready to despise him for the defect, as to hate him for the excess of this passion" (77). If we are to have a better

¹⁹ See Terry Eagleton's *Trouble with Strangers* (68).

sense of the injuries perceived by another man—or, inversely, if we are to understand whether these injuries deserve to be resented—a sympathetic encounter must begin with a narrative interpellation:

General lamentations, which express nothing but anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to enquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible. The first question which we ask is, *what has befallen you?* Til this be answered, though we are uneasy both from the vague idea of his misfortune, and still more from torturing ourselves with conjectures about what it may be, yet our fellow-felling is not very considerable. (emphasis mine 7)

The external expression of anguish incites tepid curiosity rather than full-blown sympathy. Sympathy requires contoured details rather than accessible external signs. To get these details, we must turn to the person principally concerned: *What has befallen you?* This question is both a solicitation and injunction to narrate; it is an inquiry into the details that occurred before the spectator arrived on the scene. In Smith's estimation, moral judgment always requires an inquiry or investigation that extends beyond the situation immediately and physically in view. Sympathy does not begin with a spectator passively taking in a spectacle. Sympathy requires the spectator's active intellectual participation. The spectator must read and judge rather than simply imaginatively identify with a spectacle before his eyes.

iii. beyond the body of the theatre

With the example of the spectator observing the man on the rack, and with the understanding that sympathy requires the mediation of two points of view—that of the “agent” or “actor,” and that of the “spectator”—we can understand why many scholars have attempted to deal with the complex interactions of Smith's sympathetic imagination

using the metaphor of theatre. Smith argues that in order to sympathize with another person we must envision ourselves as if we were someone else. This is to say, we must see ourselves as both an actor and audience for others. But, as we are beginning to see, the imagination is also necessary to help individuals “see” *past* what cannot be seen with their own eyes.²⁰ Unless we are informed about the circumstances that have given cause to another’s expression of emotion, we cannot, in the moment, evaluate whether the scene of their grief is appropriate to its cause.

To remind readers that a spectacle of suffering does not readily translate into sympathy, Smith considers a kind of sympathetic encounter that works outside, or even against, the confines of theatrical arena: “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers” (4). An individual, Smith argues, can only understand the feelings of others *indirectly* through the resources of his imagination. In order to feel anything at all for the spectacle of the man on the rack, an individual must recreate the experience of this other person in his own mind. Smith goes on to say that

We place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his own body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are brought home to ourselves, when we have adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and then we tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. (9)

²⁰ I make use of Luc Boltanski’s book study on humanitarianism and media, *Distant Suffering*, in this chapter as well as throughout the entirety of my dissertation, but let me say at this point that the focus of the entire book shares with my strictly eighteenth-century study a similar theoretical problem: “...the introduction of the argument of pity into politics led by a kind of logical necessity to a consideration of distant suffering. The spectator’s dilemma is not the automatic consequence of modern media even if it has been dramatised by the development of these media over the last thirty years, and especially by the development of television...On what conditions is the spectacle of distant suffering brought to us by the media morally acceptable?” (xv).

Imagining ourselves as part of the spectacle we look upon, we seemingly enter into the same situation. But, importantly, we do not become the other person we imagine ourselves to be. There is always a slight difference, a lag: our experience of another's feeling is "always weaker in degree." However much we try to enter into the sentiments of another, we can never get entirely lost in them. A sympathetic re-creation of another's grief or suffering can only be approximate. When we observe a child crying on the street, we can form no graphic conception of what he is feeling other than by way of the imagination, which can never amount to complete identification: "Though there will never be unions, there may be concords, and this is all that is wanted to required" (276).

Smith's argument for sympathy appears now to be rather self-centered. I will always feel your suffering or pleasure less passionately simply because I can only experience what you feel from the perspective of my own experience. Attempting to sidestep the charge of what Soni refers to as "affective narcissism," Smith argues that the individual self is an actor who acts *on behalf of* the other rather than in isolation from of him.²¹ When we imagine ourselves as someone else, we do not feel the exact feelings that this other person feels. For Smith, we feel *as* the other would feel if we were in the same situation. This imaginary change "is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character but in that of whom I sympathize" (323). The difference here is slight but significant. As much as it sounds like Smith is arguing for some kind of transitivity, it is clear that the self does not transform into the other person. Rather, as Griswold points out, the self imagines what it would feel if it were that other person. In this sense, the self becomes an actor *for* the other. The self does not feel what the other feels, or confuse

²¹ Soni, for example, says that Smith's theory of sympathy only "drifts" toward identificatory ethics: "the self remains wrapped up in its own affective concerns, unable to reach out to the other." For this reason, Soni thinks of Smith as offering an a theory of "affective narcissism" (309).

itself with the other. In this way, Smith can still insist, “my grief...is entirely upon your account, and not in the least selfish” (323).

Thus far, I have revealed two things about Smith’s theory of sympathy: 1) it is self-regarding in structure (for Smith, purely symmetrical identification with others is strictly impossible), and 2) there is a paradoxical quality to the idea of sympathy since it involves entering into another’s experience without an entire collapse of the self. Many commentators have pointed out that it is difficult to understand how Smith’s theory of sympathy can be consistent. Smith seems to say two things at once: the self cannot know itself without first knowing itself from the perspective of other people, and that the self is limited to what it can know only of itself. Sympathy is thus the way we become estranged from each other, or the way by which we come to understand strangers: there is the self that travels to others via the imagination—entering into their bodies as if they were his own—and there is self capable of keeping a cognitive distance from others. Paradoxically, this means that the self is both a stranger *and* a subject to itself.

Trouble arises for a theatrical understanding of Smith’s model when we contend with the issue of how individuals can know their own feelings while also using those feelings as the basis for knowing others. How can I imagine others from a position beyond myself without losing my self-identity? Or, to put it as Eagleton does, “[This] is a conundrum staged in Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, in which the distinction between two living beings is negated by an empathy so intense that it prefigures the seductive indifference of death” (71). Or, less poetically, as Marshall captures the contradiction: “Ironically, after...structuring the act of sympathy around the epistemological void that prevents people from sharing each other’s feelings, Smith seems to separate the self from

the one self it can reasonably claim to know: itself” (176). How can the individual avoid self-liquidation? What prevents the self from total annihilation?

As if he anticipated a charge of relativism, Smith goes on to argue that the apparatus of sympathy contains more than just an unfortunate and a spectator detached from any preexisting commitment. Sympathy requires some kind of assurance of disinterested involvement from ourselves and from others, “an invisible hand” (the metaphor is from *TMS* rather than, as so often thought, *The Wealth of Nations*) that puts us in perspective with others. More importantly, we need a way of judging the suitability of our own behavior at precisely the same moment that we judge the suitability of others—we need, that is, a mechanism that puts us in two places at once. Smith therefore splits the spectator in two: there is the ordinary spectator and there is an uninvolved spectator with no personal commitment to what he observes:

We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them, unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our natural station, and endeavor to view them at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than be endeavoring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as people are likely to view them. Whatever judgment we can form concerning them, accordingly, must always bear some secret reference, either to what are, or to what, upon certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others. (162)

Smith considers that men must act *against* their naturally selfish inclinations by viewing themselves from a third-person perspective, which he oscillates between calling the “judge,” “the man within the breast,” and the “impartial spectator.” This overseer is not a real person. Nor is he an abstract or general idea of any other person. He is not an actor who stands beside himself, as Marshall maintains. This “ideal” spectator is the imagined perspective of all people collectively. He is the imaginary representative of the process of moral reasoning itself, an externalized image of our own interior conscience, a figure that

observes our conduct and measures it in accordance with the would-be conduct of all other people.

According to Smith, we view ourselves with the “eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view us” (110) and our view of ourselves is the result of a process of abstraction in which we give consideration to what any “human heart” would universally find agreeable:

all the other passions of human nature seem proper and are approved of, when the heart of every impartial spectator entirely sympathizes with them, when every indifferent bystander entirely enters into, and goes along with them (69).

Sympathy is indeed mediated, but it becomes clear as Smith’s treatise progresses that it is not the self *as itself* that is mediated by the imagination. Rather, it is the self from the perspective of *all* other people from which proper rules of behavior are inducted. We discipline our self-identity to accord with the shared opinions of others, “lowering our passion to the pitch,” as Smith says, that others might go along with in their imagination (13). Moral awareness is derived from our ability to see our behavior through the hypothetical eyes of all other people. Sympathy allows us to distance ourselves from ourselves while also giving ourselves a much needed outside perspective on ourselves. It is from the perspective of the impartial spectator, the figure of *ourselves reflecting on ourselves as everybody else*, that we learn to determine whether our conduct is moral or not.²²

With all this talk about the “eyes of everyone,” the metaphor of theatre begins to break down. The theatre is not only a metaphor for seeing in Smith’s account. It is primordially a physical place where an audience and a performer, or a set of performers,

²² Cf Kant’s “maxims” of common sense in the third *Critique*: 1. Think for oneself; 2. Think from the standpoint of everyone else; 3. Think consistently.

see each other face-to-face. Separated from each other by an imaginary invisible wall, the spectator and actor must “conceive” their blindness in the theater. The question then arises: how exactly do we “see” ourselves and others if, in Smith’s account, we must rely on a third-person to “see” ourselves as a body in action before an assembled audience and, also, as the assembly itself? To put it another way, if a third party is necessary to see for both the one and the many—if, that is, we must vacillate between self-interest and indifference—are we still in the theatre? It would seem that Smith’s theory of sympathy requires that we be in two theatres at once, a theatre of the mind and a theatre of the world. In Smith’s account, the imagination bridges the distance between an empiricist model of an individual who cannot “see” beyond the limits of his own eyesight, and a political philosophy with a view to the general community. The impartial standpoint is necessary for social harmony and requires two kinds of seeing—a physical kind of “seeing” limited to the individual, and an imaginary vision that assumes the role of the whole social body.

Smith, of course, does not propose the idea of inhabiting two theatres at once. But he does make a comparison between the work of the imagination in visual perception and in moral judgment. He says “it is only by consulting this judge within, that we can see what relates to ourselves in its proper shape and dimension” (134). The “eye of the body,” he suggests, does not see objectively. Objects appear great or small according to the nearness or distance of our position relative to them: “an immense landscape of lawns, and woods, and distant mountains, seems to do no more than cover the little window I write by” (135). To this pictorial metaphor, Smith adds a comparison with moral theory. The “loss or gain of a very small interest of our own” will trouble us more

than “the greatest concern of another with whom [he] has no particular connexion” (135). After this, Smith carries the comparison between visual perception and moral judgment one step further, arguing that to see beyond the self-limitations of the “eye of the body,” we need to change positions: “We must view them, not yet with his, but from the place and with the eyes of a third person, who has no particular connexion with either, and who judges with impartiality between us.” (125). What we are beginning to see is that in Smith’s theory there is a tension between what can be “seen” with certainty (what is empirically and epistemologically obvious to the individual) and what can also be imagined based on the recommendation of somebody else’s certainty. Hume, who in a famous passage used the mind as theatre metaphor, also notes this tension:

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations... The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or the materials, of which it is composed. (253)

For Hume, the problem is that the mind does not know if the stage really exists. For Smith, the problem is that we need someone else to sit between the audience and the spectacle and arbitrate what we are seeing, or *should* be seeing. As Marshall suggested in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the spectator needs to be accompanied by a critic who views the spectator and the spectator from an equal distance. To understand ourselves—to sympathize with ourselves—we must govern our passions to render them congenial to the impartial spectator who stands by silently to signal his approval. This kind of conceiving, I have been suggesting, is to see without really or actually seeing. It is the possibility of seeing past what we are limited to seeing from our own perspective. Unlike theatre, where an actor feigns blindness to an audience

physically in his presence, Smith's theorizes the idea of "seeing past" what cannot be seen by the physical body.

When we "conceive" the sentiments of others, it is not a case of sublime overreaching. "Conceiving," in Smith's analysis, is a code word for regulation. Our passions are imperfect on their own. We are either too heated in our temper or too icy with our contempt. Smith suggests that sympathy is actually a disciplining of our emotions for the sake of a harmonious social sphere. We perform and imagine the proper pitch that "others are willing to go along with" in their imaginations. Given Smith's preference for metaphors from music, it is difficult to slot Smith's theory of sympathy with the tradition of the *theatrum mundi*. It is precisely because actors can play the part of affliction on the surface without the corresponding feeling coming from within, that Smith posits the need for the impartial spectator as an equalizer, or "tuner," of sentiment. Sympathetic performance requires social encouragement and control, a flattening of everybody to the standards of everybody else. As Chandler puts it, the impartial spectator allows each individual to see her "own littleness in the world" ("Politics of Sentiment," 561). Each individual sees his or her equivalence to a larger group rather than his own self as an individual separated from an anonymous and unidentified mass.

So unlike the dyadic relationship of the theatre, which involves a spectator observing a spectacle, Smith's theory of sympathy aims at the possibility of a general social bond between one person and all people. What interests Smith is the possibility that individuals can bridge the fundamental distance between themselves and other spectators through the form of a third person narration. In many ways this is still a theatrical arrangement because it is still based on the spectatorship of the impartial

spectator. But with the introduction of the impartial spectator (the spectator of the spectator), moral action is the result of the observation of our behavior from a third-person perspective. It is the metaphor of seeing ourselves from the perspective of someone else seeing us. It is a seeing that is a *seeing on behalf of someone else*, which is therefore a triangular structure more applicable to the kinds of narration and formal structures we see in the eighteenth-century novel. In the chapters that follow, I will offer examples of how the sentimental novels of Richardson, Sterne and Shelley devise conceptual forms to compensate for the limitations of the body, suggesting that one of the major formal differences between the sentimental novel and the representative tradition of theatre is that the novel distances the reader from the physical source of passion, allowing the construction of feeling to be determined by external sources and evidence. The emergence of the novel in the eighteenth-century takes place against a background that is beginning to test the moral and discursive limitations of fiction. With the arrival of the novel, the idea developed that moral truth might be demonstrated by widening the sphere of the individual's social interest. Unlike theatre, the novel has the unique capacity to promote the double perspective of interior examination and widened social perspective. Smith's splitting of the spectator is novelistic, not only because the social scope is widened to take in the perspective of a third person—the perspective of all—but also because the gaze between the spectator and the spectacle is internalized. The spectator looks past what he sees on the outside and returns into himself, listening to what the “man within the breast” tells him; he goes from exteriority to interiority and vice versa. Luc Boltanski argues Smith should be singled out from other eighteenth-century moral sense philosophers. “There is no question,” he argues, “that the figure of the

uninvolved spectator observing a suffering unfortunate is employed in Adam Smith in the most rigorous and systematic way to found a moral theory which also appears as an empiricist social psychology and political philosophy” (35). Put another way, Smith charters a political philosophy because he gives the individual, whose understanding is limited to the physical senses of the human body, the guiding “sight” of a generalized social community.²³

iv. distant objects becoming near

I have suggested that epistemological problems emerge in Smith around the question of what can be “conceived” in his theory of sympathy. And I have noted that Smith’s moral theory offers a complexity of vision more specific to the novel as a form. At this point, then, we have arrived at the central problem of thinking of sympathy as a form of spectatorship. To state the problem baldly: Smith seems to say that we should be wary of what we see when we observe the spectacle of someone else’s passions. We need to take distance from our own impulses and see ourselves from the perspective of an outside author. We need to find the note of equality from which to tune our emotions. But Smith also argues that we are limited to what we can know; our understanding of others is always only approximate. I’d like to now suggest that the division between sight and conception is fundamentally a political question for which the comparison of the theatre

²³ For a different account of Smith’s relation to Hume and Hutcheson see D.D. Raphael’s *The Impartial Spectator*. Raphael argues that the uniqueness of Smith is not in the political extension of his theory of the impartial spectator but of its internalization: “A spectator theory accounts most easily for judgements made in the third person (judgements about “him” “her” or “them”) and well enough for second person judgements (those about “you”); but it is apt to be in difficulties with judgements made in the first person (about “me” or “us”) (31).

might mislead us. To see the political division I have in mind, I want to now touch on the limits of sympathy, which we can see from Smith's reaction to Stoic conceptions of cosmopolitan benevolence. It is here where the political fate of Smith's literary politics is to be decided. What we find is that when the imagination moves away from the empirical self it gets duller and weaker with distance, like a tired traveler who has come too far from home. This is to say, when we get to the macro level of sympathy's form—the real spatial limits of its orbit or compass—we see that at this point in the Smith's theory, distance disrupts and dilutes the power of sympathy.

Smith proposes two senses of how our interaction with others might be restricted: the idea that we cannot know ourselves without being short-circuited by the judgment of the impartial spectator third party, from whom we discipline our passions, and the idea that we are limited only to the judgment of those who are near us and whose judgments we can understand. To see an example of this second kind of restriction, consider the case of the furious man. Smith says that the “furious behavior of an angry man is more likely to exasperate us against himself than against his enemies. As we are unacquainted with his provocation, we cannot bring his case home to ourselves, nor conceive anything like the passions which it excites” (11). Using a metaphor of geographical distance (“bring his case home to ourselves”) Smith underlines the cognitive distance between the external perception of furious man's anger and the passions that might be discovered to ignite it. As Smith goes on to explain, “nature” has not “taught us” to be sympathetic to the “general idea of provocation” (11).²⁴ General rules, such as the failure to feel sympathy for a man provoked into anger, are devised from the customary conduct of what the “anyone” or the “everyone” would do in a like situation. In other words, the impartial

²⁴ See Chapter 1 of Festa's *Sentimental Figures of Empire*, for an elaboration on this point (27).

spectator is not some lonely force onto himself, a force who decides, from a distance, how behavior should be viewed. He is the gathered opinion of all people as individuals who might be thought the same.²⁵

A more telling example of how Smith restricts interactionism is the example Smith offers of a “scene” of suffering in China:

Let us suppose that the Great Empire of China, with its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity... If he was to lose his little finger tomorrow, he would not sleep tonight; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his brethren, and the destruction of that immense multitude seems plainly an object less interesting to him than this paltry misfortune of his own. To prevent, therefore, this paltry misfortune to himself, would a man of humanity be willing to sacrifice the lives of a hundred millions of his brethren, provided he had never seen them?

Smith’s answer to the question of whether a man of feeling would care more for a cut on his finger than the millions of his own brethren lost in an earthquake is quite similar to Laurence Sterne’s depiction of a protagonist who cares more for a caged starling than the millions of his brothers born to slavery (I discuss this in Chapter Three). But for Smith, individuals are, to quote Jonathan Lamb, “enslaved to circumstance” (55). Whatever interest we take in the fortune of those with whom we have connection, who are placed outside of the sphere of our activity, can produce only anxiety to ourselves, without having any manner of advantage to them. Smith argues that individuals should stick to their own circumstances and refrain from the contemplation of sublime matters: “To man is allotted a much more humble department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers and to the narrowness of his comprehension—the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends...” (237).

²⁵ See Marshall’s *The Figure of Theater*, 167.

Smith admired the stoic theory of cosmopolitanism, a philosophy that upholds the value of a “wise and virtuous man” who works against his self-interest and becomes “[n]ot something separated and detached, but a citizen of the world, a member of the vast commonwealth of nature. To the interest of this great community, he ought at all times to be willing that his own little interest should be sacrificed” (237). But as much as he appreciated this aspiration, Smith did not believe that the vast majority of men could jettison their self-interest for the sake of universal harmony. The sympathetic imagination can only approximate sympathy with people in close range—in other words, with those who are familiar. The restricted range of sympathy, argued Smith, is a principle of Nature:

By Nature the events which immediately affect the little department in which we ourselves have some little management and direction, which immediately affect ourselves, our friends, our countries, are the events which interest us the most, and which chiefly excite our desires and aversions, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows. (238)

Ourselves, our friends, our countries. This is the scope and range of Smith’s sympathetic imagination for the common, unexceptional man.

There is something bizarre about the way Smith predicates the localism of sympathy on the argument that feeling beyond the arbitrary borders of the nation is *too* reliant on the imagination—it is too much in the imagination, too “conceived” to be “seen.” When sympathy reaches beyond what can be comprehended, Smith argues that it amounts to nothing but a “certain affected and sentimental sadness, which, without reaching the heart, serves only to render the countenance and conversation impertinately dismal and disagreeable.” Because Universal Benevolence is a prospect entirely of the imagination, it can never reach the individual’s heart, which makes it “sentimental” in his

estimation. But how, we must ask, can this limitation be reconciled to Smith's earlier statements about how all identification is impossible, that the imagination is *always* necessary as a mediator for understanding the pain of others? Why, when he gets to a discussion of universal benevolence, does Smith begin to impose this proximity requirement? If all identification occurs through the resources of the imagination, why is sympathy with someone who isn't a fellow-citizen especially artificial? Why can I feel for someone on the other side of my country—whom I've perhaps never met—and not for an earthquake victim in China?

The answer might seem obvious. Adding to his thoughts about the opacity of the pain of people at a distance, Smith makes two other arguments against Universal Benevolence: first, even if we *could* hear the plaintive voice of misery from a distance, there would be nothing we could do to alleviate that suffering—the person is outside the range of our activity. While we might imagine and be interested in their suffering, we cannot dream of alleviating it. In such a case, commiseration would be “perfectly useless.”

To what purpose should we trouble ourselves about the world in the moon? All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety upon that account, seems to be no part of our duty. (140)

Smith's argument here is that we have no duty or responsibility for others when we are not close enough to physically aid them. Sympathy is thus about practical limitations. The “perfectly useless” sentiment of benevolence testifies to our passive good nature and inactive spectatorship. Man, argues Smith, should not concern himself with matters of the sublime; he should stick to his “humbler department: the “care of his own happiness, of

that of his family, his friends, his country.” Here is where the most important paradox of Smith’s theory emerges: sympathy requires that we distance ourselves from ourselves to take on the conceptual sight of the whole community, but it also requires that we remain physically connected to the scene in front of us. It is tempting, as has been the case with most theatrical readings of Smith, to see this as conservative move on Smith’s behalf: Smith sets limits on sympathy that are practical and physical rather than epistemological; he capitulates to custom, requiring that we internalize social norms. But, as I will now suggest, it is possible to “conceive” Smith’s paradox otherwise.

v. imagination and equality

I would like to close with the possibility of two political readings for Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The first one is a recapitulation of the reading we have already followed. We have seen that sympathy is predicated on our perception of a resemblance between ourselves and other people, and this resemblance is the work of “conceiving” ourselves as someone else. We saw how this leads to a contradiction: Smith begins *TMS* saying that “the senses never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations” (3-4) of a man on the rack. Later on, however, Smith appears to contradict this statement, suggesting that the spectator cannot form a sense of what the man on the rack senses beyond the limits of his own senses:

Every faculty in man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them (18).

Smith has argued that the physical senses cannot permit exchanges of sympathy. But even so, in this passage he suggests that the physical “faculties” must correspond to what they sense and, vice versa, that abstract ideas must be judged only by the same self-experience of the one judging. Raphael refers to this passage as a “ridiculous generalization” (20). As he argues,

Smith is simply wrong in saying that we have no other way of judging of the faculties of other people. In the case of sight and hearing we can judge by other forms of perception. When my neighbour sees a firm straight edge where I see a fuzzy one, I can check by touch. If he hears a sound when I do not, I can check by consulting a third person, known to have acute hearing (20).

So Raphael insists that there is a way that judgment can proceed by way of a kind of cross-contamination or extra-sensory judgment where one sense is used to verify the existence of another sense. The sense of touch can help us discover if an edge is straight or fuzzy, or a third-person can be brought in to verify whether a sound has been heard. Writ large, Smith’s entire theory of moral judgment is triangulated in this way: we check our behavior by imagining it from the perspective of another, or we evaluate the conduct of another person by imagining ourselves as this person. This is all well and good until we realize that Raphael’s example of cross-verification is physical in implication: can we use our physical senses to understand something that has no physical sense, or vice versa, can we imagine something physical that we have not seen or heard or felt? So while the entire *TMS* functions as an account of the kinds of sensations that we might conceive in our imagination rather than through our eyes, and under what circumstances these sensations might be judged moral and good from this third perspective, it is important to note that early on in the treatise Smith sets what appear to be arbitrary limits on individual conceptual powers. In evaluating our emotions, we notice what others approve

of, and from this we establish criteria for our own behavior. Although relations to others and self-interest are thought to be calibrated empirically, as Smith's theory wears on it becomes apparent that priority is given to public opinion rather than Nature. To a certain extent, this means that to sympathize with others and to have others sympathize with us, we must perform certain violence on ourselves. We act against our self-interest, self-disciplining our passions to accord with the opinion of others.

We thus come to see that the beginning of Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and its later chapters are deeply inconsistent. Smith begins with the premise of a radical sociability ("I consider what I would feel if I were you..."); towards the end, however, his theory establishes a complete identification between mankind and the conscience of public opinion. First he asserts the partiality of the passions, and then he builds an argument for the external authority of moral law. This amounts to a Kantian argument that self-love both creates society and destroys it.²⁶ Smith argues that sympathy is the basis of morality in general and then asserts that it is deceptive and in need of an outside judgment. In Smith's account, all moral laws are derived from experience, but the bulk of mankind has to take these rules from an authority external to their psychology. Smith wants to disguise custom as nature by charting a genealogy with an ambiguous origin. In the end, he theorizes how individuals self-regulate themselves to the dictates of custom and public opinion, which hold that sympathy can only operate within a range of self-interest.

²⁶ I am grateful to Neil Saccamano for directing me to a comparison here between Smith and Kant's idea of 'unsocial sociability': 'By "antagonism" I mean the unsocial sociability of men, i.e., their propensity to enter into society, bound together with a mutual opposition which constantly threatens to break up the society.' Fourth Thesis, *Idea of Universal History*.

This is a reading of Smith at its most cynical. But let me suggest another political reading for Smith. This reading begins with the question: why is “real” sympathy only possible within a limited, physical and practical sphere? Though Smith argues that “good will is circumscribed by no boundary” (345), he makes it clear that sympathy is confined to an individual’s “sphere both of its abilities and of his understanding” (337). Smith’s claim that sympathy can only be sustained with those who are familiar—with brothers, friends and fellow-citizens—is complicated by a reading of sympathetic identification as an act that is always predicated on a degree of difference and distance from the self. As I have shown, sympathetic “concord” is not mimesis; that is to say, there is never a complete harmony or knowingness between spectator and the “man on the rack.” If this is true, if the spectator is always rendering himself impersonal in order to enter into a “personal” relationship with others—if the familiar is rendered familiar by way of a making oneself strange to oneself—what limits Smith’s spectator from estranging himself with people he does not know?

In the following chapter on Richardson, I will show how this question is worked out by the epistolary form of *Pamela*. Before this reading, I’d like to conclude here by making a few small points about Smith’s problematic account of Universal Benevolence. Smith maintains that national prejudice will always preclude a love of mankind in general. Nationality, as Benedict Anderson has shown, is an imaginary and customary limit: we must imagine a similarity between ourselves and someone on the other side of the country. Smith’s theory of the imagination reveals the extent to which all individuals are fundamentally estranged from themselves and from others. All individuals are therefore strangers in Smith’s account; aesthetization is the only way for the unknown to

be brought home. In this sense, there is no real reason that we cannot imagine a culturally mediated view of strangers outside the view of the nation since a Man in China is just as strange to us as the green grocer down the street or the man on the other side of the country.²⁷

For Smith, sympathy is always fundamentally misrecognition. It is always indirect and non-mimetic. If we emphasize the theatrical in Smith we court the risk of turning Smith's theory of sympathy into a politics of proximity—that is to say, into a self-interested ethics predicated on certain epistemological boundaries. To some extent, an interpretation of Smith's sympathy as regulatory and interpellatory cannot be avoided, as Smith seems to be always at pains to emphasize the limitations of sympathy and the need to stoically triangulate our passions for the production of a harmonious society. But there still remains a gap between what the spectator can see for himself and what he needs help seeing, what he “ought” to see. There will always be the furious man who is too furious and an individual who hovers between having the necessary aesthetic detachment and being far flung in the imagination to “see” the sphere of his own influence. Because of the intricacy of the interplay between passion and proximity in his moral system, it is not permissible to see Smith as an egoist, or his philosophy of sympathy as a philosophy of self-interest. It is, instead, a philosophy about the equality of estrangement.

²⁷ More realistically, the impartial spectator, can be thought of as the state itself since it is clear that makes the case for the impossibility of that universal benevolence based on the view that international sphere lacks a neutral and third-person arbiter. Unlike the state, which operates an overarching, neutral power (the man within the breast), the international sphere has no external arbiter, other than God. This is the real, practical reason why Smith's epistemology of ethics ends at the borders of the state.

2. Naturalizing “the Natural:” Pamela’s Rebellion

Imagine, if you can, a time when reading a novel, or any work of fiction, produced in your body such an exquisite uprising of emotions that you were compelled, like Lady Bradshaigh near the end of Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, to throw away your book and collapse into a fit of tears:

I have shed a pint of tears, and my heart is still bursting, tho’ they cease not to flow at this moment, nor will, I fear, for some time...in agonies would I lay down the book, take it up again, walk around the room, let fall a flood of tears, wipe my eyes, read again, perhaps not three lines, throw away the book, crying out, excuse me, good Mr. Richardson, I cannot go on.¹

Contemporary readers are more likely to suffer exhaustion and eyestrain than overflow of tears while reading *Clarissa*, but Lady Bradshaigh’s tortured account of reading Richardson is a reminder of just how participatory Richardson’s writing was for its earliest readers. Tossing off the novel as if to both delay and prolong *Clarissa*’s suffering, Lady Bradshaigh performs the heroine’s agony as an actor might play a part from a script. This performance functions as a critically distanced reaction to the rape of *Clarissa*—“excuse me, good Mr. Richardson, I cannot go on!”—and an effort at mimetic identification with her suffering. Playing two parts, the critic and the actor, Lady Bradshaigh demonstrates the peculiar and paradoxical imaginative exercise at the heart of eighteenth-century sentimentalism. Richardson’s technique of “writing to the moment” — “the letters being written under the immediate Impression of every Circumstance which occasioned them” (4)—moves sympathy, the sensate and imaginative capacity to identify with the sufferings of someone else, more staunchly into the discursive domain of fiction.

¹ Barbauld, Correspondence, IV: 240) John Mullan’s *Sentimental Novels*.

Unlike sympathy, sentimentalism relays emotion through the rhetorical design of books rather than the senses of the body.

Richardson's epistolary method of eliciting passionate response is thus an indirect challenge to the materialist thinking of Mandeville and D'Holbach, who argue, in varying ways, that the power of the senses are weakened by aesthetic representation. Sympathy, says Mandeville, strikes the senses directly, coming "in at the Eye and the Ear, or both; and the nearer and more violently the Object of Compassion...the greater Disturbance it causes in us ..." (254-55).² In many respects, Richardson configures sympathy along the lines of Adam Smith as an imaginative exercise that depends on the mediating power of fiction. But the relationship between sympathy and epistolary form that Richardson ushers into existence also signals a significant departure from Smith's theatrical model of the passions.³ For Smith, it is impossible to actually share the feelings of another person. Individuals are bound by the physical confines of their bodies and thus their ability to experience the pain of other persons can only be approximate and hypothetical. While the imagination allows the suffering of others to be communicated or "brought home" to a spectator across a distance, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Smithian imagination can only operate within a sphere of influence: the earthquake victim in China is *too* far for the imagination. The "power" or acuteness of sympathy depends on the

² D'Holbach also makes sympathy the result of a transfusion between physical bodies: "Man is a material being; he cannot have any ideas whatever, but of that which is material like himself; that is to say, of that which can act upon his organ, or of that which has qualities analogous to his own." Cited in Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009) 49.

³ With Smith, for example, we have to infer to what extent the imagination relies on the descriptive techniques of narrative. As Luc Boltanski observes, "Smith does not deal directly with the question of language in TMS. But the least that can be said is that linguistic activity was not far from his concerns since he added to the second edition of TMS his essay "Considerations Concerning the First Formations of Language," an essay that wants to show how 'abstract,' that is to say general terms, are generated from particular terms" Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 39.

proximity of its source material. The problem with Smith's account of sympathy, at least in my estimation, concerns not what the spectator's gaze objectifies, but what it cannot see objectively.⁴ In one prescient example, Smith admits that the spectator's imagination has limits, not because the spectator is inherently selfish, but because he requires a *graphic* conception that can make the distance and scale of suffering personable to him. In Smith's account, a spectator will always care more for a wound to his index finger than the fates of millions of people in China swallowed up in an earthquake. Much to the disappointment of a contemporary thinker such as Amartya Sen, who recommends the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a "global manifesto" for a new ethics and economics, Smith's spectatorial conception of sympathy was written in an age before the advent of image-based mass media.⁵

Though Smith thinks of sympathy as a "universal" passion, upon closer scrutiny, "universal" in his treatise is circumscribed by local, regional, and, less obviously, national attachments. The suggestion made early in the treatise that the imagination transports a spectator out of his own sphere entirely is sharply qualified in the later sections that deal with cosmopolitanism. In these sections, Smith makes it clear that the imagination's range is restricted to visual, face-to-face, and audible encounters.⁶ Even in cases when a spectator feels passionately for an experience depicted in narrative,

⁴ For a discussion of the paradoxical function of sympathy in Smith as an "absolution from responsibility" see Vivasvan Soni, *Mourning Happiness: Narrative and the Politics of Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) 314.

⁵ Amartya Sen, "The Economist Manifesto," *The New Statesman*, 23 April 2010. <http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2010/04/smith-market-essay-sentiments>

⁶ Smith does offer an example of a situation when speech can enter into imaginative exchange. The question "what has befallen you?" for example, can produce a response worthy of sympathy but the spectator that hears it must remain within close distance to one another. As Luc Bolanski suggests, "Although Smith does not present his schema in the form of a sequence, it is reasonable to think that the realization of equilibrium is greatly facilitated if the spectator and the unfortunate are in each other's presence [and can] interpret...external accessible to visible signs" (*Distant Suffering*, 39).

sympathy becomes possible only if the language can be recognized. The narrative must be written or spoken in language that remains within the “sphere both of [the spectator’s] abilities and of his understanding” (*TMS*). In his lectures on rhetoric, Smith uses an age-old political binary to explain the limitations of language: “words should be natives...of the language we speak in. Foreigners though they may signify that same thing never convey the idea with the same strength as those we are acquainted with and whose origin we can trace” (*Belle Lettres*, 3). Though Smith treats sympathy as a universally shared capacity, at the end of the day reason compels him to acknowledge that the imagination’s need for a recognizable context locks sympathy into a circuit with only those objects and characteristics that habit and custom deem recognizable. Thus, Smith abandons the interests of those who are remote, foreign, and anonymous to the law-based institutions of justice, reserving the fictional flights of the senses for more parochial interests.

Richardson’s epistolary method, on the other hand, exploits the resources of the budding eighteenth-century print market to challenge the restrictions Smith puts on the sympathetic imagination. Unlike Smith’s theatrical conceptualization of sympathy, the sentimental novel relies on textual rather than physical presence to transport the suffering of a fictionalized heroine into the private rooms of a wider variety of readers. As Ian Watt suggests, the significant literary achievement of *Pamela* is that its written prose “makes us feel that we are in contact not with literature but with the raw materials of life as they are momentarily reflected in the minds of protagonists” (193). Mediating presence across distance, Pamela’s letters change the social as well as geographic *sphere* of the spectator’s emotional commitment and investment, exploiting as an advantage the epistemological crisis left unresolved by Smith’s theory of sympathy. In this chapter I

would like to argue that if the Smithian imagination cannot wing itself beyond what it already holds to be credible by means of already existent social standards, the uniqueness of Richardson's writing is that it turns the absence and distance so delimiting for Smith into an advantage for the social and political recognition of a young domestic servant with no customary presence in literature. If Smith's theory of sympathy reverts to cultural distinction to define the basis of the *natural* social order, *Pamela*, I will argue, *naturalizes* sentiment as a new social and cultural decorum.

i. the object and event of sentimentalism

Let me turn first to sentimentalism, a word that has an uneasy place in the eighteenth century, especially with regard to the fiction thought to inspire it. It has been said that Richardson made sentiment the premiere purpose of both writing and reading fiction in the eighteenth century.⁷ But the application of the word "sentimental" to Richardson's fiction has always been a bit anachronistic. Before the 1770s and 1780s, when the word "sentimental" was consciously applied to novels, "sentiment" referred to a physical effect rather than a genetic name for a body of literature. In the 1740s, the word "sentimental" was not associated with what James Chandler refers to as "a new way of producing narrative," and thus it might be thought amiss to approach Richardson as a writer of sentimentalism in the textual sense that I am advocating for in this study (553). Indeed, when James Boswell insisted that Richardson's novels were too "tedious" to be read, Samuel Johnson replied that he should "consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment" (127). Sentiment, in this usage, refers to the feeling produced by narrative

⁷ See John Mullan, "Sentimental Novels," *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 245.

rather than the rhetorical vehicle of feeling itself. When Johnson tells Boswell to “consider” the story, it is unclear, for example, whether he thinks he should actually read it. As he went on to say, “if you read Richardson for the story you would hang yourself” (131).

The earliest recording of “sentimental” also makes no mention of the act and art of reading. In 1749, approximately nine years after the publication of *Pamela*, the OED’s first entry for the word is found in a letter to Richardson from Lady Bradshaigh, who puzzles over the meaning:

Pray, Sir, give me leave to ask you (I forgot it before) what, in your opinion, is the meaning of the word sentimental, so much in vogue amongst the polite, both in town and country? . . . I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is a sentimental man; we were of a sentimental party; I have been taking a sentimental walk. In letters and common conversation, I have asked several who make use of it, and have generally received for answer, it is—it is—*sentimental*.” (262)

“Sentimental,” Bradshaigh suspects, is a bit like a commodity without a use-value. The word has no stable definition other than a repetition of itself. It might strike the heart cords of a single man or run like a current through a group of people. It might be the affective purpose of a walk, or the polite subject of a conversation. It might pervade the town or remain reposed in the country. Though she writes to Richardson, whose fiction, we have just seen, held considerable sway over her own emotions, Bradshaigh does not immediately link sentimentalism to his writing or anybody else’s. In her estimation, “sentimental” is the occasion of feeling rather than the instrument that facilitates feeling.

Interestingly, contemporary scholars with a broader interest in the material and historical conditions of *Pamela*’s reception as an eighteenth-century “best-seller” have decisively referred to Richardson as a sentimental writer, but in a different sense than discussed above. These critics apply the adjective “sentimental” retrospectively to refer to

Richardson's writing as a "tangible" commodity in an increasingly "international" marketplace of readers.⁸ In reference to what William Warner famously calls the "Pamela media event," Lynn Festa likens the circulation of *Pamela* as a consumer product in France to the way that a physical body might be moved to tears by an affective scene. Festa makes a distinction, however, between the way a book traffics as a cultural artifact or object among other artifacts and objects, and the way it formally arranges its words. Privileging the former, Festa argues that the text of the *Pamela*, its arrangement of words and plot—in short, its narrative—are not as important as the social or cultural capital generated by its name: "the name and meaning of *Pamela* circulated independent of the text, detached from the novel that was its original signified; an eighteenth-century reader could fill in the substance of the story without reading the words of the novel" (78).

With this more modern application, "sentimentality" appears as an economic and social phenomenon rather than an aesthetic construct. For critics such as Festa, sentimentality is the production of effects in a circulatory system: in the first instance, the circulatory system of the body, and, in the second, the circulating system of print media.⁹

⁸ Lynn Festa's analysis of *Pamela* is perhaps the most representative, as well as the most penetrating and prescient of this kind of sociological analysis:

The sentimental novel represents forms of interpersonal communion that transcend national origins to embrace all humanity; it produces a community of weeping, powerfully moved readers united across cultural and geographic barriers by shared tears. The reciprocal movement of sentimental commodities forges material bonds between nations in a consumer zone that brings disparate audiences together in shared raptures over a literary text...the cross-Channel traffic in sentimentalism is manifested not only in scenes of collective feeling but also in the tangible consumption of texts like *Pamela* and its myriad consumer by-products.

Festa, "Sentimental Bonds and Revolutionary Characters: Richardson's *Pamela* in England and France," *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, eds Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002) 74.

⁹ Terry Eagleton makes a similar claim: "The literary text [of *Pamela*] is not merely to be read: it is to be dramatized, displayed, wielded as a cultural totem, ransacked for moral propaganda or swooned over as love story, preached from the pulpit and quoted in the salons." *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 5.

This form of analysis suggests that we cannot consider the narrative of *Pamela* as an aesthetic whole when it is a commodity with a brand name. Indeed, scenes from *Pamela* were painted onto fans; the novel became a play, an opera, and the subject of at least one public sermon.¹⁰ On the pulpit or in the parlor, merely saying the name “Pamela” conjured a diverse array of cultural associations. Merely having a copy of the novel displayed prominently on a parlor table was enough to vaunt one’s membership in a community of feeling. As a cultural object and public spectacle, “*Pamela* almost drops out of the equation; the novel fosters unity not out its inherent power as fiction but because of the value attributed to it by others” (81). Detached from its original form, Festa argues that *Pamela* becomes the “myriad of mass-produced commodities,” and “a succession of textual and non-textual surrogates” (78). For Festa, then, *Pamela* is a sentimental text only in the sense that it participates in a larger sentimental economy.

But the cultural-commodity analysis that marks *Pamela* as yet another sentimental object equivalent to all others does not account for the specificity of Richardson’s text, or, why *Pamela*—and not every other sentimental narrative—became such a “media event” in the first place. If we argue that sentimentalism does not concern the words of the novel we are not entirely incorrect. As Festa reveals, “Pamela” was a name of considerable power and that power could be referenced, or “considered,” (to return to Johnson’s language) without ever opening the cover of the book. But does this then mean we should limit ourselves to a sociological investigation of how books traffic among readers in a print economy? If we do so, I think we miss a crucial investigation of how the textual formation of *Pamela* works to produce “Pamela” as a name of reverence in the first place. How does the text of *Pamela* work to progressively install its own canonicity

¹⁰ Eagleton, *Rape of Clarissa*, 5.

as a sentimental object? How does the novel cement Pamela as a subject who can provide reference for a set of social associations? The sociological approach will not help us understand how “Pamela” comes to be regarded as a name that others might associate with certain sentimental values. It limits us to a consideration of Pamela after the fact of the narrative event that brings her into being as an official “subject of feeling.” In the beginning, Pamela’s name does not have the power of feeling that Festa associates with the French consumption of the novel. *Pamela* tells the story of a fifteen-year-old servant girl whose letters are initially regarded by her master as treasonable “scribbling” that bears no affective status. Thus, to refer to the book as a sentimental object, rather than the text as a sentimental event, is to speak of Pamela after the fact of her constitution as a subject. It is to read the novel from the retrospective position of one already installed as a member of the Pamela club. Before Pamela can transmit the value of others in a sentimental economy, she must first prove that she has a natural value located in her own person. In the following sections I will outline what I think is the creative and inherently fictional power of Pamela’s account: the way it progressively naturalizes itself as an authority against much social and sexual conflict, and how, through that process, it acquires the authenticity of an artistic and cultural object that might be used and abused by anybody. In the later sections of this chapter I will discuss how this process is not without political ambiguities.

ii. 'out of nature' to 'nature herself'

O Sir, said I, I am Pamela, indeed I am: Indeed I am Pamela, her own self! (56)

Praised for its spontaneity, informality, frankness, and familiarity, *Pamela* has been characterized as a simply expressive and therefore artless novel. Richardson's earliest readers were encouraged to accept Pamela's letters as real documents written by Pamela "herself." Richardson's name, for example, did not appear on the title page of the first edition. The letters are instead credited to "a beautiful young damsel" and introduced by a blank-faced "Editor" who bases their veracity in "his own Passions" (4). Because this editor poses himself as an "impartial" critic who can allege to have been "uncommonly moved" by the letters—a position not possible for an "Author towards his own Works"—the reader is led to believe that the letters "have their Foundation in Truth and Nature" (4). In a letter to William Warburton, Richardson argued that his reason for maintaining the anonymous posture of an editor was to "avoid hurting that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction itself is generally read with, tho' we know it to be a Fiction."¹¹ Richardson wanted his fiction to take on an historical function, but this function required a very distinct reading protocol: that fiction be read for its faithfulness to history.

Thus *Pamela* begins, famously, with an elaborate advertising campaign of "puff" letters which prepare the reader for a new kind of "natural" literary decorum. Jean Baptiste de Freval, a Grub Street translator who wrote one of many opening "puffs" for Richardson, distinguished *Pamela* from older forms of epic and autobiography, insisting that "nature may be traced in [Pamela's] undisguised Inclinations with much more Propriety and Exactness, than can possibly be found in Detail of Actions long past (5).

¹¹ To William Warburton, 19 April 1748, *Selected Letters*, 85.

Reverend William Webster, another prefatory writer, recommends the sheer honesty of Pamela's letters: "I could wish to see it out in its own native Simplicity, which will affect and please the Reader beyond all the strokes of Oratory in the world....to gloss and tinge it over with superfluous and needless Decorations, which like too much Drapery in Sculpture and Statuary, will but incumber it" (8-9). Perhaps the strongest bid for Pamela's "natural" authenticity comes from the anonymous writer whose observations Richardson included in the preliminary materials for the second edition. This writer contests the opinion that the "low scenes" from the novel—the "uncommon" eloquence of a servant girl, for example—are "out of nature." Triumphantlly, he declares the contrary:

Out of nature, do they say? 'Tis my Astonishment how Men of Letters can read with such absent Attention! They are so far from *Out of Nature*, They are absolute *Nature herself*!¹²

Richardson's "puff writers" endorse and commend *Pamela* for taking leave of the classical literary tradition and its established models of imitation. Richardson, they enthuse, offers a more "native" and naked truth: un-styled, in the moment, without adornment, reflection, or concern for custom. Of course as everybody certainly knew at the time, these endorsements were vetted and chosen by Richardson himself. He included them to bolster his own stylization of the epistolary form. In what is presumed to be a response to Fielding's attack on his writing, Richardson wrote that the "epistolary style" offers "the only *natural* Opportunity...of representation with any Grace to those lively and delicate Impressions, which Things Present are known to make upon the Minds of those affected by them" (*Complete Letters*, 97). It is only one of the novel's nagging

¹² 363 (Appendix II of Keymer's edition of *Shamela*).

ironies that Richardson's presentation of "Things Present" required such pronounced and prolonged announcement.

Contemporary critics who have elsewhere wanted to highlight the disruptive tendencies inveterate in Pamela's use of language, have not doubted that Richardson himself thought of the epistolary form, whether it passed for real history or history-*like* fiction, as a mode of presenting "nature herself." Richardson, says Terry Eagleton, had every intention of countenancing "the fiction that 'experience' can be conveyed in all its living immediacy by language, the faith that writing and reality may be at one" (*Rape*, 40). Of course, there is a paradoxical wish fulfillment to the idea that fiction might convey life as nature without any trace of art. Watt, who is perhaps the first contemporary critic to catalogue the hallmarks of formal realism in Richardson's writing, observes that "it is paradoxical that the most powerful vicarious identification of readers with the feelings of fictional characters that literature had seen should have been produced by exploiting the qualities of print, the objective and public of the media of communication" (206).¹³ Watt astutely recognizes the objectifying function of print culture for the construction of Pamela's personal authenticity. If Pamela's letters are conduits of "nature herself" then the apparatus that stewards this nature must also disappear – it must get "out of nature." The neutral and objective typeface that circulates and authorizes Pamela's letters in print must also signify as if it were an intimate blush from her unblemished cheek.

In addition to the typeface that that must passively steward her into the public, there are other complications for Pamela's veracity. Letter writing was by no means an

¹³ Yet, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, Pamela is "clearly too realist to be read simply as wish-fulfilment or moral fable." *Rape of Clarissa*, 30.

implausible or overtly radical activity for an eighteenth-century female domestic servant.¹⁴ But Pamela's letters assume an aura of subversion because of the allegations they contain against an aristocrat estate owner and because of the open manner in which they travel outside of his private estate. Initially, Mr. B commends Pamela's writing, thinking it reflects her duty and reverence for his dead mother: "Why, Pamela, you write a very pretty Hand, and you spell tolerably well too. I see my good Mother's Case in your Learning has not been thrown away on you" (12-13). But when he discovers that Pamela has been keeping confidences with his housekeeper, and that letters to her parents contain details of his amorous advances, he positively rages that the letters are inconsistent with her role as a servant: "And so I am to be exposed, am I... in my House, and out of my House, to the whole World by a Sawcebox such as you?" (31). Furthering the allegation that Pamela's letters are illegal trespasses, Mr. B calls Pamela a "great plotter" whose letters are "treasonable papers." He also refers to her several times as a "bold-face," a word almost certainly borrowed from L'Estrange's edition of Aesop's *Fables*, which Richardson translated into English prior to publishing *Pamela*. In the fable "A Fox and a Knot of Gossips," an old "trot" (hag) calls a fox a "bold face" for stealing "prey" that is not his own. (Interestingly, the word "bold-face" was later used to define underlined type-face in the nineteenth century). To Mr. B's allegations of slander, Pamela deflects blame, arguing that she cannot help but speak the truth: "it is not me that expose you if I say nothing but the Truth" (31). She argues that her letters are merely the spontaneous conduits of a "truth" that exists independent and prior to its written form: "I think I have no Reason to be afraid of being found insincere, or having, in any respect, told you a Falsehood; because, tho' I don't remember all I wrote, yet I wrote my Heart; and that is

¹⁴ See Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, particularly the chapter "Private Experience and the Novel" (189).

not deceitful” (230). Her writing has no art, she argues, because it has no motive. To speak the truth is not, she says, a deliberate attempt to publicly humiliate Mr. B or unmask his deceit: “...this, I suppose makes me such a Sawce-box, and Boldface and a Creature; and all because I won’t be a Sawce-box and Boldface indeed” (71).

Does Pamela boldly employ the arts of a rhetorician to win some substantial gain in the public sphere, or does she act out of innocence and honesty, making her passage into publicity an affirmation of her rightful place among the private? This was a key question for many of Richardson’s first readers. In the first year of its publication, *Pamela* generated at least five fictional responses, most famously Henry Fielding’s parody *Shamela*, which appeared within seven weeks of *Pamela*’s expanded second edition. Pamela’s claim to convey “nothing but the truth,” echoed by Freval in his prefatory “puff” for the novel (“her letters borrow none of [their] Excellencies from romantic Flights of unnatural Fancy”) was, for commentators such as Fielding, not so incontestable or ready-to-hand. Fielding’s parody flagrantly exposes Pamela’s proclamations of innocent virtue as the calculated use of “vartue.” Framed anew by the fictional editor Parson Oliver, Pamela is defamed as a social upstart who uses a “Misrepresentation of Facts” and “Perversion of Truth” to beguile an unwitting aristocrat into marriage (313). In this way, Fielding tries to deface the myth of Pamela’s “natural” goodness, locating in her too-pious-truth-telling a secret and exploitative desire for upward mobility. Fielding’s criticism of Richardson has become almost a standard reading of *Pamela* nowadays. Modern critics such as R. F. Brissenden and Terry Eagleton have also critiqued the “turgid idealizing” of *Pamela*. But whereas Fielding

seemed to have it in for Richardson alone, these critics see the idealizing of a country maid as evidence of larger, historical ideological project.

Marrying these smaller claims against Pamela's artfulness with a larger ideological project of denouncing the bourgeois culture that undergirds them, it has also been argued that Richardson's novel already contains its own implied critique. Thomas Keymer argues that commentators such as Fielding merely draw out in a more exaggerated manner a counter-case that the original text already wagers against Pamela's professions of honesty.¹⁵ Mr. B, for example, complains that Pamela has "Wit at Will, when she has a mind to display her own romantick Innocence, at the Price of other People's Characters" (162). Furthermore, "she makes herself an Angel of Light, and me, her kind Master and Benefactor, a Devil Incarnate" (45). In a letter to Mrs. Jewkes, accidentally overseen by Pamela, Mr. B cautions that Pamela is "an artful Creature [with] enough to corrupt a Nation by her seeming Innocence and Simplicity" (162).¹⁶ Though limited, Mr. B's point of view provides a valuable alternative to Pamela's version of the story, offering "a comparative view on facts and potential meanings" (Hunter, 45). Terry Castle suggests that single-correspondent epistolary novels such as *Pamela*, "make a far more successful vehicle for ideological statement than the multiple correspondent type [because] the dominant correspondent seems to speak with special privilege and insistence" (169). But we must be careful that we do not confuse Mr. B's interjections against Pamela as ideology critique, or, for that matter, Pamela's singular presentation of

¹⁵ Keymer argues this point quite effectively in the introduction to the Oxford edition of *Shamela*: "Indeed, to return to from *Shamela* to *Pamela*, tuned into all that *Shamela* exaggerates, is to see that his parody makes plain an awareness of alternative ways of construing the novel's action that had preoccupied Richardson all along." Keymer, xvi.

¹⁶ Much of what Pamela transcribes about persons other than herself comes about by accident, as if to emphasize the non-intentionality of her knowledge.

herself as an expression of the dominant opinion. Readers cannot easily assume this position. Not because Pamela's point of view dominates the narrative, and thus her voice appears as the sole voice of authority for the reader, but because Pamela's self-presentation operates as an important counter-case against Mr. B's more "natural" version of the social order, rather than the other way around. As we see throughout the novel, Mr. B does not need a surplus of words to dominate the narrative.

Mr. B's command over Pamela is not unlike Pamela's uncompromising insistence on her guilelessness. Both base their "natural" authority on an unshakeable sense of self-certainty. But Mr. B does not need to write letters to make the case for his personal authority. He does not need to exhaustively demonstrate and document his authority. This is because the credibility of Mr. B's word is implicit in his very social position: a county magistrate and justice of the peace, Mr. B can have his domestic servant committed for a crime without opportunity for redress or trial. When Pamela's father, for example, refuses to believe that Mr. B has safely transported Pamela to London, he lambastes the man's doubt with reference to his aristocratic status: "May I not have my word taken? ...Pr'ythee Man, consider a little who I am; and if I am not to be believed, what signifies talking?" Mr. B, we see, does not need more point of view to assert his authority. Given the preeminence associated with his rank, Mr. B has no reason to fear the allegations of his socially inferior servant. He might rage against the indignity of Pamela's allegations, and he might deride her "common talk" about his private business, but he can also calmly dismiss the consequences of her claims, knowing that "my Reputation's so well known...that I care not what anybody writes or says of me" (72-73). He is right, of course. Sir Simon, a landed gentry living near Mr. B's Lincolnshire estate, responds to

the news of Pamela's abduction in a flat, unaffected manner: "the Squire our Neighbour has a mind to his Mother's Waiting-maid? And if he cares that she wants for nothing, I don't see any great Injury will be done her. He hurts no family by this" (134). In response to Sir Simon's refusal to be moved by her distress, Pamela writes to her parents, "So, my dear Father and Mother, its seems that poor Peoples Honesty is to go for nothing" (134). Speaking from a place of no social consequence, Pamela's suffering, by the standards of aristocratic ideology, betrays no "hurt."

Pamela may have more narrative space in Richardson's novel, but Mr. B is the eighteenth-century equivalent of a media tycoon, having social and economic monopoly over how her words are delivered and interpreted. This is a point that the editor calls attention to when he awkwardly interrupts Pamela's writing less than halfway through the narrative. The interruption serves many purposes. It imparts to the reader, who could not get this information otherwise, that Mr. B has been intercepting all of Pamela's letters and has rerouted the carriage that she thinks is taking her to parents to his Lincolnshire estate. And it legitimizes Pamela's credibility against Mr. B's claim that she has been reading too many romances. Mr. B is the romancer, the editorial intrusion reveals. Pamela has naively stewarded her letters through the messenger, "honest John." But John, we now know, is "vile hypocrite" employed by Mr. B to deliver all of her letters to him first. On one particularly dishonest occasion he delivers a letter from Mr. B to Pamela's father. In this letter, Mr. B overrules Pamela's report of him in her letters, downgrading her version to a fantasy imitated from fiction:

Something, possibly, there might be in what she wrote from time to time; but, believe me, with all her pretended Simplicity and Innocence, I never knew so much romantick Invention as she is Mistress of. In short, the Girl's Head's turn'd

by Romances, and such idle Stuff, which she has given herself up to, ever since her kind Lady's Death. (93)

This is not the first time that Mr. B will undermine Pamela's professions of natural authority by likening her writing to far-fetched fantasies from literature. Whether she makes charges against him in writing or in person, Mr. B repeatedly deflates her accusations as having no clear, logical, or factual intelligence. Mere "scribbling" he calls her writing; "hideous squalling" and "blubbering" her rejection of his physical advances (68, 24). And, when belittlement is not enough to stay her pen, he dismisses everything she speaks and writes as the "noise and nonsense" (34) of a "prating perverse Fool" (33).

At least four times he accuses Pamela of concocting a story worthy of Romance:

O my good Girl! Said he, tauntingly, you are well read, I see; and we shall make out between us, before we have done, a pretty story in Romance, I warrant ye! (32)

I'll tell you, Pamela, why you need not take this Matter in such high Distain!— You have a very pretty romantic Turn for Virtue... (69)

she may be turned loose to her evil Destiny, and echo to the Woods and Grooves her piteous Lamentations for the lost of her fantastical Innocence, which the romantick Idiot makes such a work about. (163)

There is such a pretty Air of Romance, as you relate them, in your Plots, and my Plots, that I shall be better directed in what manner to wind up the Catastrophe of the pretty novel. (232)

Thus what parodies stubborn self-advocacy in Richardson's novel also functions as a powerful refusal to recognize Pamela as a credible source in her own right. The "intermittent critique" in the novel is not only—as Keymer thinks it—that Mr. B puts Pamela's "strain of pious self-justification" into question. It is that Pamela's "honest" assertion cannot be heard or understood as "honest" or "natural" in the first place. To Pamela's insistence on the "lawlessness" of Mr. B's abduction plot, Mrs. Jewkes, Mr. B's

vile administrator, says, “How strangely you talk.” In fact, she laughs heartily at the charge: “is it not Natural for a Gentleman to love a pretty woman?” (110). Downgraded to a romance plot, Pamela’s resistance commands no pathos. Sexual attraction between a man and a woman is the way of the world and, in Mrs. Jewkes’ estimation, Pamela is a buffoon for thinking that she, a lowly servant, might present a worthy case of tragedy.

Pamela’s “natural” authority is thus not natural enough in the first half of the novel. It has yet to be naturalized. *Pamela*’s fictional editor and prefatory puff writers are important naturalizers for Pamela’s future readers in this respect. Having read the letters in their entirety, they testify to the over all effect of Pamela’s writing, preparing readers for how the letters should be read and interpreted according to a new standard of representation. One writer promised that *Pamela* would eventually be “looked upon as the hitherto much-wanted Standard or Pattern for this Kind of Writing” (5). Pamela’s readers within the text do not have the benefit of this framing narrative, nor do they, at first, read Pamela’s letters as a sustained and continued collection. Instead, Mr. B, Lady Davers, and the landed gentry in Mr. B’s neighborhood regard Pamela’s letters as rebellious singularities that breach time-honored standards of public decorum. Mr. B is the first to make specific mention of this conflict when he argues that Pamela’s private regard for her “virtue” should not be as important as her outward respect for social hierarchy: “Is it not part of Honesty to be dutiful and grateful to your Master?” (31) Lady Davers continues to uphold a strict division between social positions even after Mr. B has been emotionally persuaded to accept the Pamela’s resistance as evidence of her superior moral goodness. “Thou knowest nothing, wench,” she chastises Pamela, “of what belongs to people of condition; how should’st thou?” (361).

But Lady Davers underestimates Pamela's obedience to her "natural" place in the social hierarchy. Pamela is aware that the defense of her virtue is both necessary and compromising to her position as a servant: "Did he not, my dear Mother and Father, deserve all the Truth to be told; yet I overcame myself, so far, as to say, Well your Honour may play upon a poor Girl that you know *can* answer you, but dare not" (73). In the eyes of the aristocracy, the fact that Pamela has the ability to defend herself puts her on uneasy terms with the presumed subservience that is expected from her social class. Mr. B, we have just seen, summarily passes off Pamela's complaints as imitations of a comic romance. The offence is not so much that Pamela imitates fiction, but that she is a servant-girl who puts on the "airs" of a princess. To this insinuation, Pamela insists she is not a female Don Quixote. She is not playing pretend; she is making a rational and emotional demonstration about her moral equality with her social betters: "But, O Sir! My Soul is of Equal Importance with the Soul of a Princess" (158).¹⁷ Pamela does not want to be the "Jest or Sport" of her rakish Master's wayward sexual fantasy (35). She wants to insist on a larger dimension for her social and spiritual person.

The political argument being made here, I would now like to suggest, can be understood much more richly if we liken *Pamela* to what Richard Steele and other playwrights of the school we now label "sentimental comedy" affected on the English stage at the beginning of the eighteenth-century. To the best of my knowledge, this is a comparison that has not been made, perhaps because "sentimental comedy" is a brand of theatre reviled for its one-dimensional, non-dramatic qualities and *Pamela* stresses the opposite qualities of exceptionalness and psychological depth. But Richardson's *Pamela*

¹⁷ In the *Rape of Clarissa*, Terry Eagleton re-frames the argument as follows: "*Pamela* is a sickly celebration of male ruling-class power; but it is also a fierce polemic against the prejudice that the most inconspicuous serving maid cannot be as humanly valuable as her social superiors" *Rape of Clarissa*, 17.

shares with the sentimental playwrights a desire to overturn the rules of representation that had decided for centuries under the influence of Aristotle the standards of suitable emotional response. It is this overturning of aesthetic rules, rather than the cathartic qualities of literature or theatre, that makes sentimentalism politically powerful.

iii. “a new species”

Yet notwithstanding the weight of authority, and the universal practice of former ages, *a new species of dramatic composition* has been introduced under the name of sentimental comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed –Oliver Goldsmith

I thought the story, if written in an easy and natural manner, suitably to the simplicity of it, might possibly introduce *a new species of writing*, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvelous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue –Samuel Richardson

Though he would have us believe that he writes in a vacuum, Richardson’s “new species of writing,” like Smith’s account of the human passions, has an important precursor in the theatre. The dramatic sentimentalists of the early eighteenth-century were not initially referred to as sentimentalists. As I suggested earlier, the word “sentimental” did not enter the public lexicon until the late 1740s. Playwrights such as Colley Cibber, George Farquhar, and Richard Steele inherited this title later in the eighteenth century. When examined in retrospect, their plays were thought to betray characteristics of a similar “species.” Earnest Bernbaum, one of the earliest critics to study the form, offers what is still its best working definition:

...the founders of the school accomplished between 1696 and 1704 work of lasting importance. They destroyed forever the tradition that the pathetic must be excluded from comedy, and that virtuous characters must be confined to romantic drama. They created several characters which were in the future to be copied, with slight variations, again and again—the abused yet loyal wife, the maiden faithful to her absent lover, the pitiable forsaken mistress finally restored to respect, the repentant young prodigal, the nobly generous friend and the wayward but reclaimable husband. (95)

Restoration comedies emphasize and ridicule vice, folly, and error on the stage. They present a lowly version of humanity, one in which to laugh at a character's downfall is to critique his rakish immorality. "Sentimental comedy," on the other hand, promotes a "natural" goodness universal to all persons, regardless of social position, past behavior, or available mode of expression.¹⁸ For Raymond Williams, the coupling of pathos with comedy on the stage offers "an interesting case of a changing society leading directly to a radical innovation in form...new forms were made, by extension or discovery, as a positive expression of a new spirit" (621-22). This "new spirit" developed in no small part because increased middle class participation in theatre led to a demand for new forms of representation consistent with this class' more "polite" social consciousness. Valuing restrained passion and patient reflection over bold, contentious behavior, sentimental comedy conceived a new form of social morality. To theatre critics such as John Dennis and Oliver Goldsmith, this new morality was both socially and aesthetically disruptive. Goldsmith, in particular, vehemently opposed the mixing of lower-order characters from comedy with the emotional identifications proper to highborn tragic characters. He argued that this "new species of dramatic composition" combined tragedy and comedy in a manner that elicited sympathy for the wrong kind of people:

Comedy is defined by Aristotle to be a picture of the frailties of the lower part of mankind, to distinguish it from tragedy, which is an exhibition of the misfortunes of the great. When comedy, therefore, ascends to produce the characters of princes or generals upon the stage, it is out of its walk, since low life and middle life are entirely its object...

¹⁸ Ironically, Mary Wollstonecraft's criticism of Edmund Burke's expression of "natural feelings" with regard to the French Revolution (among other things she charged him with being too "sentimental") is reflexive of the kind of new consciousness of which Williams' speaks: "your tears are reserved...for the declamation of the theatre, or for the downfall of queens...whilst the distress of many were vulgar sorrows that could not move your commiseration" (*Vindication*).

If we apply to the authorities, all the great masters in the dramatic art have but one opinion. Their rule is, that as tragedy displays the calamities of the great, so comedy should excite our laughter by ridiculously exhibiting the follies of the lower part of mankind...Nor is this rule not without the strongest foundation in nature, as the distresses of the mean by no means affect us so strongly as the calamities of the great...(490)

When lower order characters from comedy brazenly become the subject and objects of sentimental feelings, the tragic order (the order of princes and kings) is thought for

Goldsmith to be “invaded.” The effects of this invasion are by no means positive.

Tragedy, as Goldsmith understands its classical orientation, uses pity and fear to support and maintain the social order by keeping each character in his or her rightful place.

Comedy’s use of pathos, on the other hand, upends the idea of a rightful place to no certain end. The involvement of comedy and sentimentality for the portrayal of private life in theatre is neither entertaining nor socially useful. For Goldsmith, it is frustratingly “out of its walk.” Out of reverence for the dramatic rules inherit in “nature,” Goldsmith insists that the “distresses of the mean” cannot have a strong bearing on the emotions of the audience. But Goldsmith here shows himself at pains to justify a rule from “nature” that can only be proved if it continually yields the same result: “the great” will have a strong emotional effect on the audience, whereas “the mean” will inspire laughter. That sentimental comedy worked to achieve the opposite result exposed the arbitrariness of the natural foundation on which Goldsmith rested his class and classicist divisions. It showed that the “natural ground” of the dramatic arts obscured unnatural and artificial social hierarchies.

What I would now like to suggest is that we should also think of *Pamela* as “species” of sentimental comedy, though in a looser way. Richardson’s novel ends with the elevation of the heroine to marriage, and it features a view of her life as a private

individual. I will discuss the political implications of this comedic ending at the end of this chapter. For now, let it be said that we might find the satisfying nature of this ending more politically radical than conservative. Even though the end of the novel capitulates Pamela to the aristocratic status position, the mere fact that Pamela can be capitulated to this order is radical in its own way because it undoes the one-dimensional rules of comedy. Indeed, the bold maneuver of the novel, a maneuver which discomposed Richardson's critics and many of his friends, was that a servant girl was shown to overcome the limitations of her class position by "metamorphosizing" into a Lady. This, on its own, is not, strictly speaking, enough to classify Pamela as a comedy. But the disavowal of generic conventions is something that the dramatic form of sentimental comedy and the early novel can be thought to share. Goldsmith, himself touches on a worthwhile comparison between the two forms:

Those abilities that can hammer out a novel are fully sufficient for the production of a sentimental comedy. It is only sufficient to raise the character a little, to deck out the hero with a riband, or give the heroine a title; then to put an insipid dialogue, without character or humour, into their mouths, give them mighty good hearts, very fine clothes, furnish a new set of scenes, make a pathetic scene or two with a sprinkling of tender melancholy conversation through the whole, and there is no doubt but all the ladies will cry and all the gentlemen applaud. (490)

Both sentimental comedy and the novel manipulate pathos for subjects who cannot, in Goldsmith's opinion, transmit emotion naturally. Lady Davers makes a critique of this kind when she dismisses Pamela as "painted dirt." The suggestion that Pamela's entrance into a socially superior life is a cheap imitation of the natural social order is not unlike Goldsmith's de-classing, later in his essay, of sentimental comedy as a "mulish production" or as a "bastard tragedy." Both Goldsmith and Lady Davers veil their fear of political collapse with aesthetic reproach; emotional connection with persons of lower

social orders, they argue, can only be pastiche. The reason for their fear is obvious. When the objective of comedy becomes moral awareness, rather than ridicule, social behavior, especially for the upper classes, is no longer an inconsequential source of gossip or entertainment. It is no longer the case—as Mr. B initially originally thinks—that a reputation is “too well known” to suffer injury from private behavior, or that a maiden’s loss of virtue is merely a social rather than a spiritual death. Sentimental comedy brings the behavior of all persons under the eyes of God.

Richardson, however, adds a deeper psychological dimension unavailable to the theatre. The effect of his writing is that, in addition to God, the reader becomes a judge of social behavior. The access to Pamela’s subjectivity, as it is permitted through the epistolary form, creates the conditions of identification not limited to the audience’s impression of theatrical role-reversal. Richardson displaces Mr. B’s version of “natural” authority by turning Pamela’s words into a kind of anti-writing—writing that generates truth from the emotions of the body rather than social position or rank. Significantly, the recognition of this emotional dimension requires that the reader take distance from Pamela’s physical body. (This is where Richardson most readily departs from the empirical model of the passions). Pamela’s body, as we see from many of the comments made by her onlookers, is distractingly “pretty.” Indeed, it is Pamela’s uncommon prettiness that first catches Mr. B’s eye. It is her captivating physical presence that he can neither “bear nor forbear her,” as he says to Miss. Jervis. The point of Pamela’s prettiness is that it is a snare. It turns her into a spectacle for the theatre rather than a textual authority in her own right. To turn Pamela out of the theatre and into the mind of readers, her body must be covered by her textual writings. This happens quite literally when she

stitches her letters into her undergarments to prevent them from being found and read by Mr. B. As a textual shield, Pamela's letters shift the guarantee of her emotional veracity to the physical reactions of her readers. Like the audience of the theatre who respond viscerally to the actors performing on stage, Pamela's readers register and confirm Pamela's moral and political worth. For example, after Pamela refuses Mr. B's proposals to keep her as a mistress, Pamela strategizes a certain test whereby Mr. B's emotional reaction to reading her letters becomes the index of her social value. She agrees to disclose all of her letters—a risky affair because she must literally undress to offer them to him—with the caveat that, “if you can read my Reflections and Observations upon your Treatment of me, with Tranquility, and not be mov'd, it is a Sign of a very cruel and determin'd Heart” (239). Pamela thus turns the reaction to her letters into a new kind of moral signification. If Mr. B is unmoved by Pamela's entire account he is a cruel villain; if he is softened, he is a man of acute moral understanding. In this way, Pamela retreats from the stage of her own distress, shifting emphasis to the creative power of her body as a textual corpus.

Unlike the visibility of the theatre, the emotional reaction generated by Pamela's papers requires time and reflection. As I suggested earlier, Pamela's letters cannot impact readers in their singular form. They must to be accumulated and read in continuum. This is one reason why Pamela's journal, which she keeps during her captivity in the Lincolnshire house, is more important than her “in the moment” letters. Both Mr. B and Lady Davers are moved to accept Pamela's “natural” worth only after they have retired to read her collective “papers.” It is especially important for Mr. B to take distance from Pamela's body as his sexual passion interferes with his judgment:

Had I not parted with you as I did, but permitted you to stay till I read your Journal, reflecting as I doubt not I shall find it, and till I had heard your bewitching Pleas in your Behalf, I fear'd I could not trust myself with my own Resolution. And this is the reason, I frankly own, that I have determin'd not to see you, nor hear you speak; for well I know my Weakness in your Favour. (247)

Removed from Pamela's body, Mr. B takes time to reflect on the series of her sufferings, resolving eventually to marry her legitimately. Lady Davers needs more time. Even after Mr. B's marriage to Pamela has been sanctified in law she still refuses to accept Pamela as anything other than her mother's waiting maid. But eventually Pamela ratifies the idea that Lady Davers might be moved to accept her if she is privy to her complete story: "if your Ladyship knew all, you would pity me; for never poor Creature was so hard put to it" (452). Thus she makes a request to read Pamela's story rather than hear it directly:

I understand, Child...that you keep a Journal of all Matters that pass, and he has several times found merits to get at it: Should you care that I see it? ... for I find it had no small Weight with him in your Favour; and I should take great pleasure to read all his Stratagems, Attempts, Contrivances, Menaces, and Offers to you, on one hand, and all your pretty Counter-plottings...your resolute Resistance, and the noble Stand you have made to preserve your Virtue (454).

Like Mr. B, Lady Davers is moved to accept Pamela's natural goodness after she has borrowed and read all of her papers. From that point on, the story of Pamela travels outward to the entire neighborhood, until, at last, Pamela receives the news of a generous social acceptance from the suggestively named Mrs. Worden: "Ay, Child, you have been all our Subject. I don't know how it is but you have made two or three Families, in this Neighbourhood, as much your Admirers, as your Friend here" (439). Of course, we know how this reception comes to be finagled. "Pamela" becomes a household name through the progressive reception and accreditation of her full story in the words of other people.

iv. "...every lady a *Pamela*?"

Pamela, said he; you chop Logick very prettily. What the Duce do we Men go to School for? If our wits were equal to Womens, we might spare much Time and Pains in our Education. For Nature learns your Sex, what, in a long Course of Labour and Study, ours can hardly attain to. But indeed, every Lady is not a Pamela...

Now it remains to be decided: Does Pamela's publication of herself naturalize her to an already existent social order, making her story an aberration, an exception, rather than the open foundation of a new social and aesthetic order? Many critics have pointed out how Pamela's triumphant resistance—her pertness, her irascible "Logick," the "salt and sauce" of her language—dwindles into wifely compliance at the end of the novel. It is often said, especially of Richardson's revised editions of the novel in which Pamela's more rebellious language is scrubbed out, that Pamela loses her stubborn authority at precisely the moment that she achieves her greatest social (and commercial) success.¹⁹

On the one hand, *Pamela* offers the "pattern" for a new form of representation, a form that defies the custom of an inherited representative order by verifying its own inscription in the body of readers. By testing the bodies of her social superiors, Pamela permits the possibility of a radical argument. This is the argument, as she says to her parents, "we all were on the same foot originally and surely these proud people never think what a short Stage life is; and that...a Time is coming, when they shall be obliged to submit to be on a Level with us." The reference to the shortened stage here might remind us of the affinity between Richardson's novel and the representative collapse in sentimental comedy. But, on the other hand, even if the bodies of her readers verify Pamela's textual corpus, these readers are still responsible for its social acceptance. Part of Pamela's loss of authority

¹⁹ Again, the most damning criticism of this kind is offered by Eagleton: "By the end of *Pamela Part 1*, discours has yielded ground to lague: Pamela the pert colloquialist has become Pamela the genteel housewife, tirelessly producing anonymous platitudes. Her linguistic absorption into the ruling class is effectively complete, to be drearily perpetuated in *Pamela Part 2*...she is now the collusive victim of patriarchy, triumphantly elevated into enemy territory" *Rape of Clarissa*, 26.

has to do with Mr. B's rewriting of Pamela's story as one—as he says in the passage cited above—in which “every Lady is not a Pamela.” While Pamela can say to her parents that Lady Davers' view of the servile class is politically untenable (“we all were on the same foot originally”), Mr. B. acknowledges Pamela's moral equality only to insist that it is an unnatural exception to the natural social order. As Michael McKeon puts it: “if Pamela's reward for virtue is to have any meaning, the moral authority of the social order by which it is conferred must remain intact despite evidence of social injustice manifest in the very need for her reward” (364). Pamela can write all she wants, but in order for her words to be anything but “noise and nonsense,” someone with more social authority must stamp them with official approval and send them on their way.

Paradoxically, then, the reconfiguration of class positions that come with marriage at the end of the novel are the result of Pamela's stubborn commitment to her commoner origin. In this regard, it is possible to regard Mr. B. as the novel's true “radical.” Against his sister, Lady Davers, who wants to arrange an aristocratic marriage of alliance, Mr. B. rejects a proposal based on his sense that the beliefs of his familial upbringing have been in vain. He abandons the ideology of his social position, and in so doing, elevates the position of Pamela, who retains the principals and ideals that have always been part of her script. It is therefore Mr. B. who stages the most profound political rearrangement in the novel, though his condescension can be absorbed by the power of his sex. He is keen to remind his sister that an upper class woman could never marry a lower-order man without undergoing a social death. So in many ways, Richardson cannot fully escape the recidivism of Smith's argument about the limitations of sympathy. The novel's expansion to endorse Pamela as a social subject, marrying her off to Mr. B. as a reward for her

steadfast commitment to her own honesty and virtue, ends up redoubling a frame of perception society already has of its female subjects: they should be obedient, compliant, and recognizable by more powerful social arbiters. While *Pamela* may exemplify a subversive model by which oppressed and marginalized figures “cultivate a sensate and embodied existence as a political resource,” we also have to deal with the way Richardson’s fiction, in the interest of being treated seriously, mortgages itself to a didactic and normative function (Lamb 3). Like Smith, who cannot let sympathetic exchange go so far that the spectator can no longer weigh its merits in accordance with his preexistent social mores, in Richardson’s fiction sympathy is afforded only for those who can be accommodated into the social order based on social likeness. It resets social axioms rather than recasts them, promoting what once was an obscure individual to a new social bracket as a reward for her ability to remain steadfast to her proper place as a servant. So even though Richardson more seriously engages with the newer forms of social media and methods of communication in the public sphere, it is precisely the seriousness of his investment in representing “reality” that finds Pamela serving the same moderating function as Smith’s imagination, “lowering passion to the pitch that others *might* go along with” (emphasis mine).

But, as I have attempted to argue throughout this chapter, the aesthetic and political achievement of *Pamela* might not to be found at the ending of the novel. It is in the process of subjectivization that leads to this end. We need to remember several things. First, Richardson gives the power of expression to a new object, a lower-class servant girl who expresses a voice not hers by “nature.” Giving a servant girl a hitherto unknown psychological dimension, Richardson disrupts a system of ordered representation that

separates subjects into base and beautiful, or comic and tragic subjects, and assigns them relationships appropriate to their character and circumstances. Second, he lets this new voice circulate among a wider public, outside of the domestic house that wishes to keep its servants silent or the theatrical stage that insists on the presence of the actor. Detached from her physical body, Pamela's letters generate powerful new forms of emotional understanding based on the material power of words rather than intellectual rules of decorum. Third, and finally, Richardson supplants the instantaneous or passionate basis of sympathy in the theater—the division of parts and their associated representation—with a version of the novel that generates sympathy over distance, time, and reflection. These alone may be the limits and great achievement of Richardson's poetic achievement in *Pamela*: to expose the arbitrariness of a system of social hierarchy and to use that interval to open up a prolonged dispute about natural authority and what it entails. When Pamela borrows the language of her superiors, she does not collusively assimilate into their order; she exposes the bias on which the division of the social spheres has been predicated and she reveals the process by which an “unnatural being” might be naturalized into an order that is simultaneously natural and unnatural. Her success—conservative as it seems to many readers—is her ability to prove that she cannot be excluded from an exclusive social order. In this limited sense, Richardson provides a formal optic by which persons with no social or political standing can stage their equality with others through the mediating and emotionally disruptive capacities of language. It is an aesthetic and political project that will take on ever more imaginative and fantastic forms over the course of the eighteenth century.

3. Jest in Earnest: Sterne's Sentimental Passport

I mention this...as a warning to the learned reader against the indiscreet reception of such guests, who, after a free and undisturbed entrance, for some years, into our brains,—at length claim a kind of settlement there,—working sometimes like yeast;—but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,—but ending in downright earnest. — Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*¹

Published in 1768, just three years after *Tristram Shandy* made him one of the greatest literary wits of the eighteenth century, *A Sentimental Journey* has been thought to demonstrate Laurence Sterne's conscious switch to sentimentalism as a commercially attractive literary mode. Sterne's first readers viewed the novel's sentimentalism as an admirable, even emulable, guide for living a compassionate and moral life. Thomas Jefferson, for example, regarded the novel as one of his favorites, arguing that the buffoonish antics of Sterne's man of feeling could not detract from the author's overall moral message: "We neither know nor care whether [Yorick] really went to France...or whether the whole be not a fiction...we are pleased with [his] subsequent atonement, and view with emulation a soul candidly acknowledging his fault."² Frederic Schiller also appreciated Sterne's sentimentality (Sterne was extraordinarily popular in Germany), and went further than Jefferson to endorse, rather than disregard, the comedic elements in *A Sentimental Journey*: "How readily can laughing Yorick touch our minds at will so loftily and so powerfully!" he exclaimed. Characterizing Sterne as a writer who, along with Fielding and Cervantes, offers a "satire" that is "on behalf of the ideal," Schiller dismissed the idea that Sterne's novel was obligated to positively demonstrate or express

¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Eds Melvyn New and Joan New (Penguin, 2003), 49.

² Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 30 vols. (Princeton, 1950) 76-81.

the seriousness of its truth: "...through malicious jests," he suggests, "a serious reason shines forth, which avenges the truth against the sophist and does combat for an ideal, which it merely does not always express."³ Even the otherwise grandiloquent Percy Shelley spoke admiringly of Yorick's declaration of love for a cypress plant in the desert.⁴

But for contemporary critics the issue of whether Sterne wanted to satirize the fashionable cult of sensibility or let his novel pass as a serious reflection on the merits of sympathy has been the subject of much debate.⁵ Critics have gone back and forth, arguing that the novel is both a critique of the naivety of tender-heartedness and an ironic unmasking of its implicit selfishness.⁶ Yorick's tender regard for an abandoned désobligeant in a coach-yard, for example, or his burst of tears for a dead ass on the road, seem too glaringly bathetic to be taken seriously as attempts at ethical outreach. Many

³ Schiller, Friedrich, Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, and L. A. Willoughby. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Oxford, 1968).

⁴ "Sterne says that if he were in a desert he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes a living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was." Shelley, Percy Bysshe, and H. Buxton Forman. 1880. *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, London: Reeves and Turner.

⁵ For a full discussion of this debate see Thomas Keymer, "A Sentimental Journey and the Failure of Feeling," *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne*, ed. Thomas Keymer, (Cambridge, 2009).

⁶ For readings concerned with the ideological work of sentimentalism in general see, most notably, Terry Eagleton, *The Trouble With Strangers* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Blackwell, 1990) where he argues that the sentimental creates a "natural," "bodily" and "mediatory" register (what he otherwise likes to refer to as "ideology") for a concept of social cohesion. Also see, John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998); Mary Poovey, who argues that sentimentality functions as a covert economic strategy ("its paradigm of innate benevolence initially sanctioned the laissez-faire individualism that gradually transformed England from a paternalistic hierarchy to a modern class society") in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago, 1984), 66; and the second chapter of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Adorno and Horkheimer, who are read more for their critique of Enlightenment reason than for complaints against compassion, espay a dangerous continuity between the "logics" of pity and reason. For criticism of the ideological and/or bourgeois thrust of Yorick (and Sterne's) sentimentalism see especially, Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue" *The New Eighteenth Century*, eds. Nussbaum and Brown (New York, 1987); Carol Watts, who reads Sterne's novels as stories of ideological and imperial "accommodation," in *The Cultural Work of Empire: the Seven Years' War and the Imagining of the Shandean State* (Toronto, 2007); and Judith Frank, for whom Yorick's sentimentality is a disciplinary discourse that turns him into a "virtual imperialist of sensibility," in *Common Ground: Eighteenth-Century English Satiric Fiction and the Poor* (Stanford, 1997).

have characterized Yorick's sentimentality as disingenuous, hypocritical, narcissistic and apolitical, concluding that either Sterne wanted to consciously critique the ideological motivations of sentimentalism, or otherwise he wanted to carelessly cavort with them. Terry Eagleton, for example, squares Sterne off as a profiteer of sentiment ("sentimentalists like Steele and Sterne are self-conscious consumers of tender feelings, chewing the cud of their own congenial emotions"), but then guiltily adds a footnote where he admits "Sterne, however, is an ambiguous case, as a satirist of sentimentalism as well as a probable champion of it" (*Trouble with Strangers*, 25). For Eagleton, the ambiguity attached to Sterne's critical vision is the problem of sentimentalism in general. Distracting readers from grim economic and political realities, "sentimentalism, and the literature produced by it, tends to be whimsical, digressive and idiosyncratic, preferring the pale sheen of a snowdrop to prison reform. It is in every sense a luxurious ethics" (*Trouble with Strangers*, 19).

Perhaps Sterne is partly responsible for the modern tendency to think of sentimentality as an inappropriate measure of response to a trivial or dramatically simplified subject. *A Sentimental Journey*, it is often noted, is one of the first sentimental novels to stretch feeling to the point where its expression appears inadequate to the point of ridicule. In the estimation of William Makepeace Thackeray, for example, Sterne is "always looking in my face, watching his effect, uncertain whether I think him an imposter or not; posture-making, coaxing, and imploring me...He exaggerates his grief so as to get his reader's pity for a false sensibility."⁷ The modern point is not only that

⁷ Thackeray, William M, and Edgar F. Harden. *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century and Charity and Humour*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2007. As if to protect himself from pity under false pretenses, Thackeray scrawled incredulous remarks and questions in the copy-text of the novel once lent to him: "Does anybody believe that this is real Sentiment?" he wrote of Yorick's lament for a dead ass

sentimental novels such as *A Sentimental Journey* are too fictional to be taken for reality, but that Yorick, like Don Quixote before him, takes his own feelings a little too seriously.

Tom Keymer's reading of the novel is emblematic of this opinion:

At one level, the painstaking account that Yorick gives of the flux of feeling is a heartfelt (as well as technically groundbreaking) attempt to register on the page the complexities of inward experience, including the impulses of sympathy and benevolence, and written in the face, Sterne clearly intimates of impending death. Yet Yorick's effusions of sentiment border too often on sickly concupiscence; his words and deeds are too often undermined by ironic innuendo; he is too often self-absorbed, too fickle in his attentions, too enraptured by the aesthetics of distress not to seem, an object of implicit mockery. (90)

I do not disagree with Keymer's reading here. But in this chapter, I would like to make another argument, a less negative one, for the digressive qualities of Sterne's sentimentalism.⁸ We need only call attention to the issue of Yorick's legal and political status in the novel, an issue that has thus far gone unaddressed by Sterne scholars and scholars of sentimentalism more broadly. To use modern parlance, Yorick is an illegal immigrant. He is travelling without a passport. In the first volume of the novel, Yorick smuggles himself into Calais in the suite of another traveler. Once in France, he undergoes a variety of seemingly random sentimental encounters with a monk begging alms for his friar, a dead ass on the road, a lonely cypress plant in the desert, and a mysterious woman in a Remise. In the second half of the novel, these encounters are interrupted when Yorick's servant informs him that he must produce a passport to the

on the road. (Sterne's editor, Melvyn New, refers to these marks as "cardinal scholarly sins"). Cited in Wilbur L. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne* (Macmillan, 1909), 447. See Melvyn New, Introduction to Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, xvi.

⁸ Though the entirety of her chapter focuses on Yorick's effort to "constitute himself as a gentleman" (a claim that begins with an exploration of how Yorick's status as an unpropertied gentleman would put him dangerously close in status with the poor) Judith Frank's discussion of *A Sentimental Journey* does lead to a discussion of Yorick's legal right to be in France. She argues that Yorick fantasizes himself as a pathetic victim as part of a "apotropaic gesture by which he both rehearses poverty and powerlessness and wards it off" (87).

Chief of French Police. Fearful that he might end up a prisoner in the Bastille, Yorick appeals to a Count, jesting that he is Yorick from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Mistaking the fictional reference to mean that Yorick is a distinguished member of the English royal household, the Count makes an appeal to the local magistrate and Yorick is invited to settle in France as a naturalized foreigner. Reduced to this basic outline, it is all the more strange that the same critics who would celebrate the proleptic post-modernity of *Tristram Shandy* have attacked the sentimental digressions in *A Sentimental Journey* as politically conservative.⁹

In what follows, I will argue that *A Sentimental Journey* is not a satire of sentimentalism; it employs sentimentalism as a strategy to evade the restrictions of a certain legal plot. Yorick's opening commentary on the Droits d'aubaine, a law that would restrict the celebrated free-passage of Shandyism, suggests that Sterne intended in his second novel a far more nebulous confluence between narrative waywardness and political right of passage than his readers have noted. The sentimental form of the novel (which many have likened to the picaresque journey of Don Quixote) strings together a series of sentimental portraits—the Poor Franciscan, the Flemish lady in the Remise, and the gallant servant La Fleur—according to the whim of the protagonist's emotions rather than the reasoning of a set of intelligibly-linked actions. Crowding the narrative as these individual portraits do, sending readers madly off in all directions, Sterne's sentimental portraits prefigures and reinforce similar concerns and conceits about what it means to be

⁹ Conservative readings of irony in the novel can be found in the work of Judith Frank and Madeleine Descargues. Frank writes that Yorick's project of sympathizing with the lower classes is always in the service of establishing himself as a gentleman: "by voluntarily and self-consciously inhabiting the position of the lower classes, Yorick wards off a similar fixing of his own character" (66). Descargues also argues that Yorick is the subject of to "an ironic treatment" that is meant to make him "stumble in the faithful representation of himself" (244).

a foreigner without political rights and representation. These portraits are part of a narrative strategy that works to evade the kind of identification that makes subjects and objects knowable according to preconceived categories. At the beginning of this chapter, I will over-emphasize some of the tiny details in Yorick's most famous encounters to show how sentimentality works as a *deliberately erratic* or *digressively compliant* effort to equivocate against the interpellatory mechanisms of the state and expose their contradictions. Or, to put it in the words of our errant knight, I will argue that "we can see the precise and distinguishing marks of national characters more precisely in these nonsensical minutiae than in the most important matters of state" (72).

i. the droits d'aubaine

"When the heart flies out before the understanding, it saves the judgment a world of pains" --Yorick

The political context of Sterne's sentimentalism hovers unannounced in the open frame of the novel's first sentence: "They order this matter better in France," says Yorick. We do not know what "matter" the French order better, but the next sentence carries the comparison from the dinner table to the political realm: "Strange!" exclaims Yorick, "that one and twenty miles sailing, for 'tis no further from Dover to Calais, should give a man these rights—I'll look into them" (3). The "right" that Yorick refers to here is the *droits d'aubaine*, a law, as Yorick goes on to inform readers, stipulating that "all the effects of strangers (Swiss and Scotch excepted) dying in France, are seized... tho' their heir be upon the spot—the profit of these contingencies being farm'd, there is no redress" (3). Distraught by thought that his death might be imminent (he has been suffering indigestion from a fricasseed chicken) and that then the King of France would be entitled to all the

property in his portmanteau, Yorick rushes back to his cabin to outfit himself in every article of clothing that he owns. But the defense is futile because, as he realizes, “the whole world could not have suspended the effects of the *Droits d’aubaine*—my shirts, and my black pair of breeches—portmanteau and all must have gone to the King of France—even the little picture which I have so long worn, and so often told thee, Eliza, I would carry to my grave, would have been torn from my neck” (3-4).

Why does Sterne begin his sentimental novel with a discussion of the King of France’s right to the property of dead foreigners? Some critics have claimed that Yorick’s interest in his personal property establishes early evidence of his bourgeois self-interest. But if we consider his status as a foreigner, we soon realize that Yorick’s agitation with the *droits d’aubaine* has less to do with the potential loss of his property than it does with the feeling that the law is contrary to a universal principle of sentimentality he has always associated with the French people: “Ungenerous!” Yorick goes on to say, “to seize upon the wreck of an unwary passenger, whom your subjects had beckoned to their coast—by heaven! Sire it is not well done; and much does it grieve me, ‘tis the monarch of a people so civilized and courteous, and so renown’d for sentiment and fine feelings, that I have to reason with” (4). Yorick’s use of the word “beckoned” in this passage sets up an interesting political comparison between the King, who “seizes” Yorick’s possessions based on the letter of the law, and the King’s gentler and more “civilized” subjects, who mutely welcome him to their shore. Unlike the King’s act of seizure, which involves a clear claiming of an object, “beckoning” is both an active and passive mode of signaling between two parties. It can be a wave of the hand, for example, or a feeling of being drawn in by no particular force. Yorick’s feeling of being “beckoned” is thus not unlike

the reader's position at the beginning of the novel. Just as Yorick enters France anonymously summoned by the subjects of the French King, readers "arrive" belatedly into the novel, entering without invitation in the middle of a conversation.

Yorick's feeling of being "beckoned" into France also corroborates historian Peter Sahlins' research on notions of nationality in eighteenth-century France. Sahlins argues that in the eighteenth century the political significance of the *droits d'aubaine* extended beyond its function as a feudal tax on foreigners. Before 1789, there were no citizenship laws in France. Prior to the French Revolution, the common link between French persons was not their status as political subjects, but their shared subjection to the same king. Lacking an official way to differentiate his subjects from foreigners, the *droits d'aubaine* furnished the king with the ideological material necessary for a definition of the "royal model of the citizen:"

The *droit d'aubaine*, in an expansive and political definition of the practice, became the centerpiece of French nationality law. This was the case in practice, in the bureaucracy of naturalization. But it was also the case in politics, where the crown appropriated the *droit d'aubaine* to tax the alien population of the kingdom, and thus to mark the divisions of citizens and foreigners. (32).

We thus see that Yorick's concern for his portmanteau portends something far more delimiting than a post-mortem loss of property. It betrays an incredible sense of vulnerability about being a foreigner in a country not his own. In a political context such as this, John Mullan's celebrated theorization of sentimentalism as an exceptional and privatizing connoisseurship seems inadequate.¹⁰ Mullan argues that Sterne's ironic treatment of Yorick's feelings "might equally well be taken to be fatalistic, atavistic, defensively playful. He does not describe a sociability that could ever be a practical model of being in society (198). Mullan is correct that the dream of a universal sociability

¹⁰ See Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*.

is ironically underscored in *A Sentimental Journey*, particularly when, against his loftier ideals (as I will show in a moment) Yorick finds himself “predetermined” not to be charitable to a poor monk. But to reduce Yorick to the victim of a bad joke, whose failed attempts at sympathy cast him as an overambitious and impractical sentimental statesman, is to also overlook how *A Sentimental Journey* exposes sociability as a problem for foreigners rather than an achievement.

With Yorick’s delimited status as a foreigner firmly in mind, we should proceed to re-read Yorick’s famous commentary on charity. Scholars often read this passage in isolation as merely one sentimental vignette among others in the novel. But I think it acquires a different interpretation when we consider it in the context of Yorick’s opening discussion of the *droits d’aubaine*:

Just God! said I, kicking my portmanteau aside, what is there in this world’s goods which should sharpen our spirits, and make so many kind-hearted brethren of us, fall out so cruelly as we do by the way? When man is at peace with man, how much lighter than a feather is the heaviest metals in his hand! *he pulls out his purse, and holding it airily and uncompress’d, looks around him, as if he sought for an object to share it with*—In doing this, I felt every vessel in my frame dilate—the arteries beat all cheerily together, and every power which sustained life, perform’d it with so little friction, that ‘twould have confounded the most *physical precieuse* in France: with all her materialism, she could have scarce have called me a machine—...the accession of that idea, carried nature, at that time, as high as she could go—*I was at peace with the world before*, and this finished the *treaty with myself*—(5)

Kicking aside his property, Yorick acts out a typically Rousseauvian opinion that property is the vanquisher of a natural and original peace. Importantly, the temporality of this moment is such that Yorick is driven to be charitable in lieu of an outward stimulus, such as a person’s social, national or economic position. Without knowing why, the purse in Yorick’s imagination is pulled out and extended by his hand *before* an external object

is present to claim it.¹¹ In fact, an object does not appear to be necessary at all for his body to be roused to felicity. The “*as if*” here suggests that the object can only be approached by way of analogy. The arm only appears to reach out for an object; there need not be an object at all. So even though Yorick takes pains to dissociate his charity from the showy materialism of the *physical précieuse*, his language remains patently materialist. He imagines his body as a machine that is auto-induced rather than socially determined. If only the King of France were like this, Yorick’s dangling purse insists, if only the King “beckoned” with his body rather than demanded with his law.

This passage, which depicts sentimentality as the physical communication of bodily fibers and dilating arteries, is Yorick’s solution to the violent identification demanded by the *droits d’aubaine*. Yorick’s opening apostrophe—“Just God!”—coupled with his intention to replace the King’s law with his own generous hand—“If I were the King of France what a moment for an orphan to have begg’d his father’s portmanteau of me!”—confirm that he implicates the motions of his body with an ethical foresight that has the capacity to override gross reduction to both materialism and to the sovereignty of the King of France” (6). Yorick says his system “confounds” the radical materialist—and here we can easily think of Sterne alluding to the famous theorist of the automaton, La Mettrie, whom he met during his travels in France in 1762.¹² But just as he suggests that

¹¹ One possible objection to this schema—or at least another reading of the temporality expressed in this passage—is that Yorick’s physical inducement towards charity comes *after* he has contemplated the more general and philosophical question of charity. Thus, it could be argued that Yorick is moved by an outward stimulus: the intellectual category of charity itself. For my purposes, however, I am interested in addressing how Yorick consciously envisions the temporality of charity as one that moves inwardly and then outwardly.

¹² This interpretation is consistent with Martin C. Battestin’s reading though I emphasize the “as if” of Yorick’s hand to suggest its relationship to the King’s hand. Battestin argues that in *A Sentimental Journey* Sterne attempts to reconcile a materialist and empiricist idea of sensibility (the idea that the human will is “strictly determined” and that the human is a “soul-less, self-activating automaton”) with religious significance. Sterne’s friendship with Diderot, d’Holbach, and Hume, whom he met during his stay in

his body is made to act from a source entirely within itself, Yorick also acknowledges the possibility of the line “as if he sought for an object to share it with...” that charity might be motivated by an encounter outside of the self. Extending his arm without a sense of who will receive it, he fantasizes the temporality and materiality of his bodily movements in *reaction* to a law that would set limits on his ability to be “beckoned” into France. This impulse to thrust out his purse is in passive reception or expectation of an undetermined other—an “other” that cannot be asked by way of violence to appear before the King. Thus we see that Yorick’s first effort to act according to a principle of sympathy is to ground an ideal of charity in an embodied source because, paradoxically, this source offers precisely the location from which to proffer a theory of relating to others without relation or without force. The mechanistic nature of the body offers a way of acting *for* others *before* they can be thought to arrive.

ii. the borders of sympathy

Of course, Yorick’s idea of charity without bodies has problems. Other bodies do present themselves from time to time and sometimes these bodies must be identified and recognized in language. In these next few sections I would like to pay closer attention to the episodic nature of Yorick’s travel in France, particularly Yorick’s way of pivoting bodily inclination as a way of declining from the teleological direction of plot (the

France in 1762, deeply troubled his sense of religion: “In [the] early sections of the novel—and in his emphasis throughout on the physiology of sentiment, on the innumerable ways in which our bodies serve as inlets to the soul—Sterne pays tribute to the *philosophes*. But just as he accepted Locke’s empiricism—believing it to be a “holy philosophy” because sensations...were the bases both of the creative imagination and of moral sensibility—so Sterne in *A Sentimental Journey* meant to reconcile body and soul, the laws of physiology and the freedom of the will.” See Martin C. Battestin, “Sterne Among the Philosophes: Body and Soul in *A Sentimental Journey*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*: Vol. 7: 1, p 24.

direction the King would take Yorick) is both challenged and facilitated by his final capitulation to an aesthetic register in the second half of the novel.

In the encounter immediately following his soliloquy on charity, Yorick's effort to suspend the need for a representation of himself to the French King through the mechanistic motions of his body is first challenged by a monk begging alms for his convent. With this encounter, Yorick's peculiar combination of materialism and altruism is forestalled by a rationale that finds him erratically predetermined *not* to give charity to the monk:

There is no regular reasoning upon the ebbs and flows of our humours; they may depend upon the same causes, for ought I know, which influence the tide themselves—'twould oft be of no discredit to us, to suppose it was so: I'm sure at least for myself, that in many a case I should be more highly satisfied, to have it said by the world, 'I had an affair with the moon, in which there was neither sin nor shame,' than to have it pass altogether as my own act and deed, wherein there was so much of both. (7)

It now appears that Yorick has not overset the materialist's creed he vowed he would only moments earlier. Now he claims that he cannot be responsible for his lack of charity for the monk because it is "not his own act and deed," but a cause like the force moving the ocean's tides that regulates his feelings. Yorick finds the monk's impoverished appearance and "little story" of the poverty of his order "bewitching," but ultimately unpersuasive: "I was predetermined not to give him a single sous," he says, buttoning up his purse (8). The statement appears ironic, especially when Yorick goes on to ally the "moon's" behavior with an unidentified legal tenet: "The unfortunate of our own country," he argues, "surely, have the first rights; and I have left thousands in distress upon our own shore" (9). Reverting to criteria of "right" and citizenship—exclusionary language that we can easily affiliate with the *Droits d'aubaine*—Yorick champions the

poor of his own country over the poverty of foreigners. But he is not totally naive; he catches the inconsistency:

My heart smote me the moment he shut the door...every ungracious syllable I had utter'd, crowd'd back into my imagination: I reflected, *I had no right over the poor Franciscan, but to deny him*; and that the punishment of that was enough to the disappointed without the addition of unkind language—I considered his grey hairs—his courteous figure seem'd to reenter and gently ask what injury had he done me?—and why could I use him thus...(9)

In making the case that the “unfortunate of his own country” have “first rights,” Yorick ventriloquizes an “ungracious” bureaucratic language. Hearing the impersonality of this language, however, he swings back to his earlier theory of sensibility, resuming the line of attack where the only “right” he has is to deny the monk is based on the irrational physical responses of his body.

In Yorick’s initial rejection of the monk we might find the seeds of selfishness, but the failure here is not a failure of sentimentality. Yorick’s failure to hold fast to his sentimental precepts is rather a problem of foreign relations. After his encounter with the monk, he reflects, in the manner of Adam Smith, that “the unquestionable authority of nature” has erected “boundaries and fences to circumscribe the discontent of man,” and admits that it is easier for a traveler to sustain his suffering at “home” than when abroad (10). In a foreign country, communication of one’s emotions is decidedly more difficult because as Yorick suggests “the want of languages, connections and dependencies, and ... the difference in education, customs, and habits [creates] impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere” (9). The “expatriated traveler,” therefore, is in a precarious position: “his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large discount” (13). The ability to communicate out of one’s “sphere” and understand the lives and hearts of strangers determines Yorick’s “besoin de

Voyager” (15). Unlike the idle, vain, and simple travelers, who travel only to detect differences in drink and climate (and who are therefore better off at home where they will remain “dry-shod”) Yorick understands himself as a traveler who travels to overcome cultural and national differences. His statement, “an Englishman does not travel to see other Englishman,” can otherwise mean that an Englishman travels to suspend the differences between himself and foreigners (17). Yorick is therefore a singular traveler, but one with a plan to overthrow national singularity itself. For this reason, it is not amiss to think that Yorick fantasizes his singularity as a sentimental traveler because of his decidedly *unprivileged* status as a foreigner. It is true that his “ethic” of sentimental sociability is not a practical way of getting along in society, but it may now be considered an imaginative response to a practical and political necessity.

Speaking generally about Yorick’s predicament in the novel, Ross King suggests, “all attempts to avoid the equivocations of language, to divest oneself of words and to resort to mute physical gestures, inevitably lead to the reinscription of language” (139). That the “reinscription,” or inscription, into language is inevitable for Yorick is not the point of the novel, however. The point is how long can this inscription be staved off and, more importantly, how can he stave off this inscription while ceding to the political necessity of needing to answer it? This latter question is put into focus by Yorick’s sentimental encounter with the anonymous woman he meets in the Remise, an encounter that immediately follows his encounter with the monk. Celebrating a Fortune that takes “two utter Strangers by the hand—of different sexes, and perhaps from different corners of the globe, and in one moment place[s] them in such a cordial situation,” Yorick reaffirms his view of anonymous sympathetic relations, telling the reader that with the

lady he is guided by “instinct more than reason,” (28) and how he values the “silence” of their bodily pulsations over “reason” and dialogue: “We remained silent, without any sensation of that foolish pain which takes place, when in such a circle you look for ten minutes in one another’s faces without saying a word” (27). But though he values the silent pulsations of their bodies, Yorick is suddenly struck by the thought that if he does not ask this woman to identify herself he will be unable to locate her in the future. He therefore finds himself desirous of “a more *particular* inquiry” of the lady’s life. He wants to know “the *traces* thro’ which my wishes might find their way to her...in a word, I wished to know her name—her family’s—her condition...and I wanted to know from whence she came” (40).

In short, in both the encounter with the monk and with the anonymous woman in the Remise, the unboundedness of love gives way to a need for more telling details. Initially, Yorick champions a love that is born automatically between “two utter Strangers;” a love, therefore, that kindles itself without recourse to particulars of place or time. For this love to have a future, however, anonymity must be upset by the imposition of language. The future event cannot be focused, its implication cannot be seized, until it is definitely situated into a time structure with a date assigned to it. To question the name and nationality of a person might be prejudicial under the law, but before the lady he loves these questions offer the only means of carrying love beyond the coach-yard. Thus, Yorick’s sudden desire for genealogy, for the resources of a semiotic system, is not triggered by fear, as it would be for Nietzsche. As Yorick’s encounter with the Flemish woman well indicates, narration can also be born out of a desire for the longevity of love.

But what does this genealogical urge for details do to the politics of sentimentality that the novel has thus far sought to negotiate?

iv. sympathy for the many

...heaven be their resource who have no other but the charity of the world, the stock of which, I fear, is no way sufficient for the many great claims which are hourly made upon it – Yorick

Yorick vows to rely only on the erratic impulses of his heart to guide his travels in France. He left London, he tells us, “with so much precipitation that it never enter’d my mind that we were at war with France” (97). We have seen that Yorick’s first sentimental encounters in France betray a pronounced tension between a sentimentalism that recognizes others through concrete and objective particulars, such as those pertaining to national and physical identity, and a more anonymous and open-ended recognition that suspends precisely the particulars on which pity often depends. This tension becomes more acutely complicated in the middle sections of the novel when sentimentality moves from being based in the body to an aesthetic “logic” for the extension of relations beyond personal, epistemological and territorial limitations, specifically in a situation where rights cannot be depended on to secure safe passage or legitimacy. The shift is concretized in miniature in the two chapters entitled “The Passport: The Hotel at Paris,” and the chapter immediately following, entitled “The Captive, Paris,” which sponsor, in less than four pages, three different imaginative scenarios involving a situation of captivity, each following each other in such a way as to demonstrate the necessity of fiction for the representation of others who are far away while at the same time staging the conflict between the anonymity of general demands for equality and the fictional attention that has historically centered on and elaborated the individual.

The first scene occurs when Yorick discovers that he will be locked up in the Bastille if he does not produce a passport to the Chief of French Police. At this moment Yorick once again attempts to pedestrianize the French Monarch's power, reasoning to himself that the Bastille might be nothing more than a house that one lives in:

As for the Bastile! the terror is in the word—Make the most of it you can, said I to myself, the Bastile is but another word for a tower, and a tower is but another word for a house you can't get out of—Mercy on the gouty! for they are in twice a year—but with nine livres a day and pen and ink and paper and patience, albeit a man can't get out, he may do very well within—at least for a month or six months; at the end of which, if he is a harmless fellow his innocence appears, and he comes out a better and wiser man than when he went in. (100)

For Yorick, the ability to comfortably abide the thought of captivity in the Bastille is tied to the pictorial properties of scale and proportion. Reduced to a “proper size,” the Bastille is nothing more than a house, a place of quotidian confinement (the “captivity” of a writer, or of a gouty man who cannot leave his house) rather than the Burkean sublime that the very word “Bastille” is supposed to register. Readers, of course, will suspect more than a little willed ignorance on Yorick's part here, but the point of this passage is that it shows Yorick substituting the inconceivability and injustice of a fancied political power for a real situation that he has known and can comfortably recognize in his imagination.

The second reflection on captivity, which contradicts this first one, is quite literally of a smaller scale. While soliloquizing about the Bastille, Yorick is interrupted by a voice, which he first perceives to be a child crying, “I can't get out.” It is not a child, however, it is a small, caged starling. Struck by the bird's piteous cries in his native language English and its desperate fluttering against the sides of the cage, Yorick's

passions are uncontrollably awakened and he is compelled to reconsider the domestic nature of imprisonment. Now, for Yorick, captivity is decisively slavery:

I vow, I never had my affections more tenderly awakened; or do I remember an incident in all my life, where the dissipated spirits, to which my reasons had been a bubble, were so suddenly call'd home. Mechanical as the notes were, yet so true in tune to nature were they chanted, that in one moment they overthrew all my systematic reasonings upon the Bastile...Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! Said I—still thou art a bit draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou are no less bitter on that account. (101)

In this second example, Yorick references thousands of others who have suffered slavery not because he wants to enlarge the scale of slavery, or because he wants to ratchet up a more passionate response to its injustice. Instead, in Yorick's estimation, the historical scope of slavery, the enormity of its numbers, *naturalizes* rather than particularizes the suffering endured. Using the metaphor of drinking, Yorick suggests that the singularity of slavery, its bitterness, becomes diluted if too much attention is paid to the volume of the swill. To convey a more accurate picture of suffering, it is better, he suggests, to concentrate on the particular experience of one bird.

For obvious reasons, Yorick's passionate response to the poignant cry of a small starling has struck more than a few readers as ridiculously bathetic. Many authors have alluded to Sterne's starling in their own novels when they have wanted to ridicule the self-limited perceptions of their characters or denote the way sentimentality errantly mismanages the scale of the suffering it represents, or purports to represent. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for example, Maria Bertram, while looking through the iron gates of her home, cries mournfully, "I cannot get out, as the starling said" (93). In Austen's use, the starling indexes the disparity between Maria's perception of her confinement in her father's household and the colonial slaves who fuel the domestic

pleasures of the household that “enslaves” her. (Vladimir Nabokov references the starling in *Lolita* for a similar satirical purpose, this time to highlight the sexual enjoyment that Humbert Humbert experiences when he reflects on Lolita’s helplessness). In Sterne’s novel, it needs to be emphasized that the starling does not serve as a figure or metaphor for a wider condition of slavery, sexual or chattel. The starling does not function as an anecdote from which a wider story might emerge. It is not, in the first instance, an emblem. For Yorick, the encounter with the starling is an actual event. Unlike his conception of the Bastille, the bird is material; Yorick can perceive the bird’s suffering and he can hear its cries for help. Moreover, Yorick is in a position to alleviate the bird’s suffering. The starling’s suffering can be “call’d home,” as Yorick says, borrowing Smith’s metaphor, because, quite literally, the starling is already at home with Yorick.

That the starling does not function as an emblem for slavery in general—and is therefore not betraying a mystification of real inequality—is reinforced and further complicated in the third rumination on captivity. This scenario has received by far the most attention from Sterne scholars. After ruminating on his own captivity in prison, and then on the starling’s more real and immediate imprisonment, Yorick finds the prospect of trying to render the enslavement of a million creatures “distracting:”

The bird in the cage pursued me into the room; I sat down close to my table, and leaning my head upon my hand, I began to figure to myself the miseries of confinement. I was in the right frame for it, and so I gave full scope to my imagination. I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then look’d through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture. (103)

For some scholars, Yorick’s inability to focus on the “millions” of “creatures” born to an inheritance of slavery reveals, in Thomas Keymer’s words, “the inadequacy, evasiveness,

and self-indulgence of [Yorick's] sentimental response" to the "real-world problem" of slavery in the eighteenth century.¹³ While I think there is more than a little justice to Keymer's critique, I also think this critique focuses too much on the willed and self-gratifying nature of Yorick's response, neglecting to consider how, like the other encounters I have discussed, he presents the collective representation of slavery as a problem for the fictional imagination, a problem that Sterne, as a novelist, also struggled with himself.

It is well known that Sterne wrote these three passages on captivity as a response to the free'd slave Ignatius Sancho, who wrote Sterne a letter asking him to address the collective problem of slavery in his fiction. Observing the immense popularity of Sterne's novel, Sancho reckoned that the resources of Sterne's fiction might be a more effective tool for the abolitionist cause: "give one half-hour's attention to slavery," suggested Sancho, "[and] that subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many."¹⁴ In his private letters and sermons, Sterne expressed to Sancho profound sympathy for the situation of Caribbean slaves, but when it came to addressing and alleviating the slavery of "many" in *A Sentimental Journey*, he made the decision to depict the tension between the novel's intense focus on the individual and the larger social-political context that extends beyond the reach of its narrative. I do not think that Sterne wanted to highlight a moral or ethical failure on Yorick's part. Instead, Sterne's decision to betray (and it is a kind of betrayal) Yorick's need to singularize the anonymous captive in the jail cell, to make this captive's *mise-en-scène* resemble his own situation with the police in France and the caged starling, is similar to his need to know

¹³ Thomas Keymer, "A Sentimental Journey and the Failure of Feeling" in *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne*. Ed. Tom Keymer (Cambridge, 2009), 92.

¹⁴ *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, 5th ed. (1803; first pub. 1782) 70-72.

the name of the woman in the Remise. Overall these particularizing reductions suggest something about the inability of the sympathetic imagination to deal with abstraction, anonymity, and number. For Yorick, the “million born to slavery” can only be vicariously represented through the image of the “one” captive because the imagination cannot understand the multitude unless it is fictionalized into the coherency of the individual. There is the risk, as Yorick suggests with his drinking metaphor, that a concentration on the multitude will weaken an ability to focus on the singularity of suffering.

Treating sentimentality as a problem of numbers, Sterne shows himself in compliance with the conditions and limitations of sympathy outlined by Adam Smith in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, written just three years before the publication of *A Sentimental Journey*. Like Yorick, whose passion is “call’d home” by his encounter with the starling, Smith argues that the suffering of another person must always be “brought home to ourselves” before we can understand it in our imagination. We only know the experience of others, Smith insisted, by analogy with our own. It is by way of experience learned at home that the self understands the situations of the world it imagines outside of itself. Smith’s metaphor of the home corresponds with the three examples of captivity I have outlined from Sterne. In the first example, Yorick literally turns the Bastille into his home. In the second example, the suffering of the bird comes home to his imagination because it is already literally at home. In the third example, there is no home: the suffering of the multitude cannot be brought near Yorick because the million are too far away.

In addition to a shared emphasis on familiarity and proximity, Smith and Sterne both discuss situations in which the sheer number of sufferers functions as another form

of distance between the spectator and spectacle of suffering—a mental rather than a geographical distance. Though I cannot be entirely sure, I do not think any critic has noticed how both Smith and Sterne emphasize the sublime nature of suffering when it is multiplied. Indeed, in one particular passage Smith betrays remarkably similar language to the third scenario I have discussed in Sterne:

Let us suppose that the Great Empire of China, with its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity... If he was to lose his little finger tomorrow, he would not sleep tonight; but, *provided he never saw them*, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a *hundred millions of his brethren*, and the destruction of that *immense multitude* seems plainly an object less interesting to him than this paltry misfortune of his own. To prevent, therefore, this paltry misfortune to himself, would a man of humanity be willing to sacrifice the *lives of a hundred millions of his brethren, provided he had never seen them?* (136)

Smith's answer to the question of whether a man of feeling would care more for a cut on his finger than the millions of his own brethren lost in an earthquake is quite similar to Sterne's depiction of a protagonist who cares more for a caged starling than the millions of his brothers born to slavery. For Smith, individuals are, to quote Jonathan Lamb, "enslaved to circumstance." Whatever interest we take in the fortune of those with whom we have connection, who are placed outside of the sphere of our activity, can produce only anxiety to ourselves, without having any manner of advantage to them. Smith argues that individuals should stick to their own circumstances and refrain from the contemplation of sublime matters: "To man is allotted a much more humble department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers and to the narrowness of his comprehension—the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends..." (237) Both Smith and Sterne are united in their emphasis on the narrowness of the sympathetic

imagination. But Sterne offers a uniquely fictional way in which the “million” are able to make an appearance in a book ostensibly not about them directly. By the jerkiness of the narrative movement from the starling to the million and then from the million back to the starling, Sterne calls attention to the very process by which the lives of other people are obscured by the attention we cannot give them. This is to say, Sterne solicits attention to the “yoke of slavery” endured by many individuals precisely by taking attention away—by digressing from the subject he cannot speak about in confidence.

This analysis might now appear as an apology for Yorick’s failure to dwell more substantially on the problem of Caribbean and African slavery. This is not my intention. Yorick’s failure to resolve the contradictions between the inclinations of his body and the duties owed the state gives resonance to a collective conflict of inequality because the contradictions of his “heart” are staged as problems and negotiations with the law rather than as examples of ideological evasion. Sympathy for the many appears to be within the orbit of possibility in Sancho’s request that Sterne help ease the yoke of slavery in his writing, and it is understood as an appropriate demand for readers of a novel. But it is clear from all the ironies and tensions in Sterne’s novel that it is not easy for a novelist to establish a framework through which this collective representation might happen. Sterne’s solution is to make the attempt for representation in the breach. What we might think of as Sterne’s “digressive method of compliance” is most obvious, I will now argue, in the solution he devises for a passport.

v. the passport

How many mean plans of servile address, as I went along, did my servile heart form! –Yorick

The law demands your name, and the passport gives it back to you. In the second volume of the novel Yorick's sentimental system digresses from a passport much as in the first volume it tries to evade the King's law. Interestingly, Yorick's striking indifference to carrying a passport in the second half of the novel parallels his contempt for the *droits d'aubaine* in the first. Returning to his hotel, after an unsuccessful attempt to buy a set of Shakespeare's plays, Yorick is informed by his servant, La Fleur, and the master of the hotel that the "Lieutenant de Police" has been looking for him. At this point, Yorick admits to the reader that he has been traveling without a passport. In haste, he embarked for France without thinking about the document. Later, when he realized that he might need it to enter the country, he hid in the Count de ****'s suite until reaching Calais. Though he faces imprisonment, he nonetheless casts the matter off, stubbornly maintaining his sentimental outlook that that he "shall do very well" without a passport in Paris: "Poo! said I, the King of France is a good natured soul—he'll hurt nobody." No longer the piratical leader who seizes the portmanteaus of "unwary travelers," the new and improved version of the king has the collective goodness of his subjects. Yorick declares that he will not comply with the police "for all the Kings of France in the world." By imagining the possibility of other Kings of France, Yorick enacts a Hobbesian separation of the symbolic function of the king as the Law, and the particular man occupying the throne. The particular man is contingent, he is a physical body, and thus his demands might be refused. La Fleur, however, kindly reminds Yorick that for all his kings of France there really is only one sovereign, and his authority cannot be cavalierly

refused: “La Fleur whispered in my ear, That no body could oppose the King of France.” (98).

At this point in the novel, when the stakes of imprisonment are real, Yorick is left with the decision about whether to give up his sentimentalism and identify himself as a subject before the law. A passport, as Michael Salter suggests, identifies its bearer according to bureaucratic and juridical apparatuses. It is “intended to serve as a sovereign’s assurance to other members of international society that the citizen being endorsed is safe” (5). Yorick knows that his passport, in being “directed to all lieutenant governors, governors, and commandants of cities, generals of armies, justiciaries [sic], and all officers of justice,” is paradoxically the one document that allows him to “travel quietly along” (85). Yorick’s dilemma is thus twofold: if he endorses himself as a citizen who is safe, he concedes that the king has a right over him, a preferential right that is contrary to his sentimental ethos. If, however, he refuses to answer to the question of his name, he risks deportation, or worse, imprisonment in the Bastille. Yorick’s passport is therefore not a happy document that gives him easy “connection with another,” as Melvyn New has suggested (“Yorick’s quest for his passport suggests indeed not so much a search for an identity as for connection with another, for only in communion with the other does the self fully emerge”) (186). The passport is certainly a connective mechanism but one that installs Yorick before a law that would require that he identify himself as a foreigner rather than a friend.

Thus we see that the end of the novel hinges on this question: does the necessity of a passport mean that there is no other way of getting along in the world without the identification and protection of the law? Yorick, as we might expect from one of Sterne’s

characters, will not yield an answer quite so easily. But before explaining the brilliance of the solution he devises, there are two articles that must be explained in order to help us understand it.

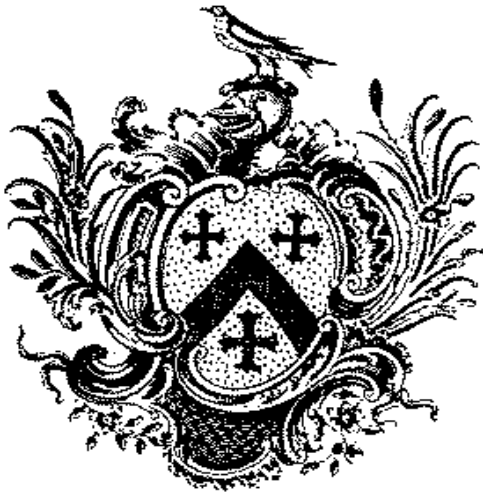


Figure 1.

The first article is the only pictorial image on display in *A Sentimental Journey*. This is the picture featuring Yorick's family coat of arms with the starling perched on top gazing to the viewer's left. It appears in the chapter entitled "The Starling: The Road to Versailles" and it is inset in the novel immediately following the scene in which Yorick sets the starling free and immediately before he makes his first attempt to procure a passport. The image is followed by one final sentence before the chapter closes in which Yorick dares the "heralds officers" to "twist his neck if they dare" (156). Many critics have commented on the graphic images and visual effects on display in *Tristram Shandy*: the black and marbled pages, for example, or the "zigzag" chapter diagrams.¹⁵ But the above picture has not received much attention beyond the odd footnote or notes-and-

¹⁵ See Peter J De Voogd, "Tristram Shandy as Aesthetic Object" in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy: A Casebook*. Ed. Tom Keymer (Oxford, 2006), 108-118.

query-style speculation concerning its relationship with Sterne's own family heraldry. (There has been, for example, some discussion about whether the homological association between "starling"—Latin "starnus"—and "Sterne" suggest that Sterne intended the coat of arms to represent his family crest).¹⁶ I am, however, more interested in the relationship of the image to the narrative of the novel, especially the plot for a passport.

Following the insert of the photograph, Yorick's suggests that the herald officers might "twist his neck if they dare." This suggestion can be interpreted two ways. It might be a challenge that the herald officers should twist Yorick's neck if they want to charge him with illegally adding the bird to his coat of arms. Or, the remark might be a more literal instruction to the officers to twist the bird's neck from its crane to the left. If we recall the "bend sinister" from Tristram Shandy's coat of arms, left-leaning looks are a sign of bastardy.¹⁷ Both interpretations share the sense that the bird illegally occupies an official means of identification. Given Yorick's situation with the French Police, this redoubled sense of illegal occupation moves us away from the more sinister interpretation that Yorick's desire to protect the starling demonstrates a vainglorious concern for private property. The image itself anticipates Yorick's solution to his own identification problem with the French police, serving a similar anticipatory function as Yorick's discussion of the *droits d'aubaine* in the first lines of the novel served for his soliloquy on charity.

¹⁶ See Melvyn New and W.G. Day's commentary for the chapter entitled "Starling, the Road to Versailles" in *A Sentimental Journey*, 107.

¹⁷ This is the interpretation offered by Michael O'Shea in "Laurence Sterne's Display of Heraldry," *Shandean* 3 (1991): 61-69. Melvyn New and W.G. Day, in their annotative notes, which include a reading of this argument, suggest that "since the shield is always described from the bearer's viewpoint, the bird is indeed looking right, as is proper" (106).

The second article I like to discuss is the kind of passport Yorick would have been expected to carry in eighteenth-century France. Modern readers are apt to imagine Yorick's passport as similar to their own passports. But unlike a contemporary passport, Yorick's passport would contain no description of his physical appearance. Historically speaking, Yorick's passport would have been limited to a single sheet of paper, headed by a coat of arms, containing a script written in the name of the monarch requesting in "florid language" that the traveler be able to pass in France unimpeded. In France, the Foreign Secretary issued passports on the basis of familiarity. For obvious logistical reasons, this practice was given up in the more globally mobile nineteenth century. But, even then, physical identifiers such as eye-color, hair color, and height were not standard features of a passport until 1915, making it quite easy in 1858 for Felice Orsini to plot and attempt the assassination of Napoleon by smuggling himself into France using a fake English passport.¹⁸

Keeping in mind that identity appears to be increasingly constructed through documentary and narrative forms rather than the physical body in the novel, let us now consider Yorick's solution to a request he has no *official* means to satisfy. This solution begins when Yorick decides to make separate addresses to the "Duc de C*****" and "the Count de B*****" for a new passport. The rhetoric of these addresses betrays a striking similarity to the conjunction of political and sentimental language used in Yorick's encounter with the poor monk or in his imaginary reflection on captivity in the Bastille. Plotting his first address to the Duc, Yorick reluctantly considers how he must craft "words and sentences together" and produce "attitudes and tones to wreath [him]self into

¹⁸ See Mark Salter. *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations*. Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

Monsieur Le Duc de C*****'s good graces. (74). But knowing as he does that “throughout the whole surface of the globe” men are “equal,” Yorick eventually berates himself for the singularity and exceptionality demanded by what he can only see as a “servile” address. Yet he knows that if he does not “go to the Duc de C**** with the Bastille [sic] in [his] looks,” he is doomed to suffer a more gross social reduction (77). But on his way to claim pity from the Duc Yorick changes his mind. He decides to “tell his story” to Count de B**** who he knows to hold a “high idea of English books, and Englishmen” (77). As with the monk, for whom he must abandon the idea of a graciously silent exchange of sympathy, Yorick in this moment abandons the idea of appealing to a man of “fine feeling” who might take pity on his pitiful face. He gives up the idea of proffered hospitality and decides to appeal to a man who he thinks might hold his English nationality in high esteem. In making his address for a passport to the Count, Yorick decides to give an account of himself by strategically connecting his name to the greatest Yorick in all of English culture:

There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling anyone who I am—for there is scarce anybody I cannot give a better account of than myself; and I have often wish'd I could do it in a single word—and have an end of it. It was the only time and occasion in my life, I could accomplish this to any purpose—for Shakespear lying on the table, and recollecting I was in his books, I took up Hamlet, and turning immediately to the grave-diggers scene in the fifth act, I lay'd my finger upon YORICK, and advancing the book to the Count, with my finger all the way over the name—Me, *Voici!* said I. (82-83)

In one and the same moment, Yorick addresses himself before the Count as himself, and gives this self in the name of another. He jests and tells the truth at the same time: “But you are Yorick?—Yes.—Et vous plaisantez?—I answered. Indeed I did jest—but was not paid for it—t’was entirely at my own expense” (84). The Count misses the reference to Shakespeare in Yorick’s address, taking it literally that Yorick is another Yorick still, the

famous English court jester: “Had it been for anyone but the court’s jester,” the Count tells Yorick, “I could not have got it” (84). And herein lies the brilliant solution: staving off direct compliance with the law’s demands for identification, Yorick equivocates the meaning of his name to the Count, suggesting that he is the King of England’s jester, the gravedigger in *Hamlet*, and also himself jesting that he is both a jester and a gravedigger. This is similar in form to Sterne’s way of handling Sancho’s request for a representation of the collective problem of slavery: Yorick demonstrates a way of ceding to the law’s demand for a representation of his identity while also equivocating the very meaning of that identity, just as, in inverse form, Yorick draws attention to the collective problem of slavery precisely by taking his own attention away.

By using *Hamlet* to identify himself as a citizen-subject, Yorick reveals and conceal his identity at the same time. He quotes his identity without really quoting it, presenting himself in the form of another character all the while delaying an exact surrender in language. Appearing in a text he is not supposed to appear in, Yorick, in the manner of the Shakespearean fool, speaks truth to power *without needing to speak this truth through an apparatus of authenticity*. The capacity to be misread or mistaken by the Count as a jester allows Yorick, a comic figure (a heir to Don Quixote if ever there was one), to enter into the tragic plot of *Hamlet* and receive all its rights and privileges. It is the certain genius of Sterne to equivocate the truth and falsity of Yorick’s passport, allowing Yorick to distance himself from his truth claim—indeed he *is* jesting, he tells the Count—and to hold onto it as authentic, as the Count really does believe, or will not hear claims to the contrary, that he is the English court jester. In this way, Yorick enters France legally from the illegal place of a fiction.

Even so, Yorick's original fantasy of a wordless and eyeless sympathy seems to be forever cancelled by his address for a new passport. The fantasy of a wordless and eyeless "body language" that would offer "alternative access to authentic human relations" appears to be abandoned with Yorick's sober realization that he must vouchsafe his identity to the French police.¹⁹ Though his body pulsed and vibrated next to the anonymous woman in the Remise, and though his hand seemed to mechanically extend a purse without knowing to whom it had to give, Yorick's use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a mock-passport suggests that the discursive, logical and rhetorical apparatus of the law and the rights of citizenship it determines cannot simply be replaced by an ethics of the nerve endings, or through the cover of somebody else's language. Thus, Judith Frank, one of the few critics to consider the problem of Yorick's legal right to be in France, argues that Yorick's performance of sentimentality amounts to a disciplinary performance of a "safe" self: "biography" she suggests, "is a form of discipline" that allows Yorick to become a "virtual imperialist of sensibility" (66). Yorick can act the part of suffering without really suffering it in the same way that he can become Yorick the gravedigger without occupying his lowly status. But does Yorick's privileged position as a gentleman cross national borders? Does it protect him from dissolving into the suffering classes he would imperialize in Frank's account? Is it not the violent purpose of the *droits d'aubaine* to arrest this status, reducing Yorick, in law, to the status of a stranger, and thus making what Frank wants to see as "parody" of marginalization potentially an actual expression of it? The only way that Frank can base her argument that Yorick parodies suffering in order to become a connoisseur of it is if she assumes that Yorick is *naturally* separate from the pathetic people whose suffering he attempts to make his own. But as I

¹⁹ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005): 680.

have suggested, Yorick does not have the status of a gentleman in France with certainty: not only is he unpropertied in France, he is rightless. And in this very preposterous way, Yorick's statusless-status is on par with many of the pathetic victims whose suffering he represents and mimics throughout the novel.

vi. conclusion: a tale of two plots

A Sentimental Journey is a novel concerned with borders: the border between reality and fiction, the linguistic border between the proper and the common name, the territorial border between France and England, and the generic border between tragedy and comedy. It is also a book about illegal occupations: a foreigner who is not supposed to be legally in France, a bird that should not be on a family crest, and a comedic figure who should not be in Shakespeare's great tragedy. With Sterne, we are given a demonstration of sentimentality that runs over these borders towards the comically improbable. Yorick expresses emotions for persons and objects that appear "out of order." At times he depicts "pity without an object," "sadness without any apparent occasion," in Robert Burton's phrase, or "misery to no purpose" to use Samuel Johnson's term.²⁰ But far from ridiculing his mode of engagement with persons and objects in France, the gap between Yorick's expressions of sensibility and the reader's "sense" of the reality he mistakes, also permits his emergence within the social and political order of the text.

It is true that the Sterne's gestures cannot fully avoid the territory of language (as Eagleton suggests, "you do not avoid the slipperiness of the signifier by bunching a fist or shaking a stick"). But it is precisely the "slipperiness" of language that becomes a key

²⁰ See Frank H. Ellis, *Sentimental Comedy: Theory & Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 7.

asset for the politics of sympathy in *A Sentimental Journey*. Within Yorick's realization that linguistic representation is necessary for sympathetic recognition lies a different kind of political opportunity. To see this opportunity, we have had to nudge ourselves away from the view that the recapitulation of sympathy to language is always some kind of reprehensible failure.²¹ By calling attention to the aesthetic and literary forms in which Yorick's feelings are framed and re-framed, I have wanted to show how the sentimental novel might locate the possibility of recognition for subjects who cannot (or should not) be "seen" by official discourses and genres. Sterne's novel demonstrates the process by which foreigners are able to appear "as if" they are friends, not because they convincingly narrate their stories to readers in their own words, or because they stage their suffering in a way, to quote Smith, we are "willing to go along with in our imaginations." For Sterne, foreigners *appear* as friends through a daring new logic that challenges readers to distinguish the falsity of a claim for representation from the logic that has been used to determine the truth. Playing the two meanings of "plot" against each other—"plot" as a narrative sequence governed by a knowable logic, and "plot" as a secret, subversive act—Yorick's passport demonstrates the gap (or "discount" as he calls it) that allows an imposter to pass into the "real" on the basis of a jest. Yorick enters France legally from the illegal place of fiction, and we the readers, like the Count to whom he tells his story, are left to see if we still know how to sort the difference: "But you are Yorick?—Yes.—Et vous plaisantez?—I answered. Indeed I did jest—but was not paid for it—t'was

²¹ See Ross King, "Tristram Shandy and The Wound of Language" in *Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy: A Casebook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 123-146. King sees language as potentially palliative for the wounded body, but, unlike my argument for Sterne, he concludes that this "technique of compensation [must] inevitably fail, for bodily impuissance is not repaired by language but reduplicated in it" (126).

entirely at my own expense” (84). We might find it especially interesting that Sterne, a progenitor of the sentimental novel, is also one of the genre’s greatest cheats.

4. “Changing the Subject:” Sympathy and the Monstrous Form of *Frankenstein*

Men are not tied to one another by paper and seals. They are led to associate by resemblances, by conformities, by sympathies...

--Edmund Burke, *First Letter on Regicide Peace*

I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes could reply to mine.

-- Captain Walton, *Frankenstein*

It may seem strange that this next chapter seeks to further an investigation of the politics of sentimentalism in a novel long held to signal the catastrophic failure of feeling as a mode of political and social connection. First published in 1818, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* has been thought to offer one of the most dramatic critiques of sentimentality as a politics. Shelley, it is said, burlesques the values of sympathy from a decidedly Gothic angle, demonstrating the collapse of the imagination when pushed to its sublime and impossible limit. Casting her “hideous progeny” into a society that piously upholds the values of benevolence, friendship and education, Shelley gives literary shape to her mother's observation that “we can experience fellow-feeling only with those whom we recognize as fellow creatures” (90) (she was avidly re-reading the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* during the composition of *Frankenstein*). Indeed, the creature's final lines tragically confirm that the gulf between the human and the inhuman is too wide to be bridged by sympathy: “No sympathy may I ever find...in what should I seek for sympathy? I am content to suffer alone,” he says, disappearing into darkness forever (197).

What *Frankenstein* shares with Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and Richardson's *Pamela* is a critical tradition equally preoccupied with the critical function of failed

expressions of feelings as with flawed or unconvincing demonstrations of writing. Like readers of Richardson and especially Sterne, Shelley's critics have often explained the relationship of Victor Frankenstein's creation to the general community using a lexicon of "failure" and its cognates ("disappointment," "inability," and "limitation," etc.). Jonathan Lamb, for example, argues that *Frankenstein* is the limit-case for sympathy in the eighteenth century: "...an overwhelming desire for horrid sympathy," he writes, "may remain *unsatisfied*, as it is in *Frankenstein*, with worse than horrid results" (116). Susan Lanser, who analyzes *Frankenstein* as an allegory of what it means for the eighteenth-century novel to stage membership in a body politic, argues that the creature's voice offers hope for a revolutionary politics, but ultimately "*Frankenstein* enacts the *rejection* of a politics, a *refusal* to make a part among speaking bodies for the creature who has no part" (486). Mary Poovey suggests that the creature ejects *himself* from the human community at the end of the novel: "After Frankenstein's death, the monster disappears into the darkness of the novel's end, vowing to build his own funeral pyre; for it is as *immune* to human justice as it was repulsive to human love" (129), while Deidre Lynch concludes that language fails the creature in the novel: "the language learning that ushers the citizen-subject into national communities" is an "acculturation that, in the creature's case, *fails drastically*..." (206). Finally, in her reading of the human rights discourse in the novel, Diana Reese makes the point that "in the last instance, the Doctor's incapacity and subsequent, active refusal of the monster's proposition causes the monster's *failure* to be "un semblable" (53).

The language of failure has always featured in *Frankenstein's* reception history. Shelley's earliest reviewers tended to use it to address what were perceived as her

stylistic “flaws.” John Crocker from the *Quarterly Review*, for example, opined that Shelley’s novel was “nonsense decked out with circumstances and clothed in language highly terrific,” and concluded with a suggestion that she might have showed more judgment vis-à-vis the effect of her style on the moral message of the novel:

Our taste and our judgement alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is—it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated—it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding...the author has powers, both of conception and language, which employed in a happier direction might, perhaps, (we speak dubiously), give him a name among those whose writings amuse or amend their fellow-creatures. (190)

Likewise, the reviewer from *The British Critic* complained about great inconsistencies of *Frankenstein*’s plot, and the extravagance of Shelley’s writing and depiction of a story more comic and grotesque than realistic or sublime:

when we did not hurry over the pages in disgust, we sometimes paused to laugh outright; and yet we suspect, that the diseased and wandering imagination, which has stepped out of all legitimate bounds, to frame these disjointed combinations and unnatural adventures, might be disciplined into something better. (432)

And the reviewer from *The Edinburgh Magazine* was dismayed by Shelley’s unfaithfulness to natural expressions of emotion:

We hope yet to have more productions, both from this author and his great model, Mr Godwin; but they would make a great improvement in their writings, if they would rather study the established order of nature as it appears, both in the world of matter and of mind, than continue to revolt our feelings by hazardous innovations in either of these departments. (253)

Frankenstein’s first reviewers betray disappointment that Shelley does not “discipline” “his” novel to remain within the boundaries of realism. (As the Edinburgh reviewer’s use of the male pronoun demonstrates, most reviewers presumed Percy Shelley, Mary’s husband, to be the author of the novel). His story, they insist, comes across as absurd and

improbable.¹ It “frames” “disjointed combinations and unnatural adventures” and “revolts” our “feelings by hazardous innovations.” Aesthetic critiques of this kind lead to a debilitating and contradictory conclusion: Shelley writes a novel that offends the “established order of nature” (also referred to above as that which should remain “within legitimate bounds”), and yet, especially in the opinion of the reviewer from the *Quarterly Review*, she / he fails to make improvements to the human nature: “the author has powers, both of conception and language, which employed in a happier direction might, perhaps, (we speak dubiously), give him a name among those whose writings amuse or amend their fellow-creatures” (190).

Contemporary critics have not often participated in aesthetic judgments of this kind. Today, most readers readily accept that *Frankenstein* is not a great aesthetic masterpiece, even though it is often emphasized, as if to apologize for her defects or to emphasize her precociousness, that Mary was eighteen when she conceived and composed the novel. But contemporary criticism does continue to examine *Frankenstein* through the paradoxical lens of what we might call the “failed promise.” Critics routinely associate *Frankenstein* with wearily upholding a cautionary and conservative ideology, even if some of them also argue that the novel’s “failures” serve a critical function by making legible the biases that lead to, for example, the creature’s political and social exclusions. Shelley’s novel has thus inspired two interpretations: the first, that there is some potential that could have averted failure in the novel (sympathy, for example, could have been possible if the writer had done x or y), or, secondly, a more skeptical knowingness that this potential must always fail (sympathy is never possible; Shelley

¹ In this way, the critiques of Shelley’s novel are similar to the critiques against the sentimental novel—Sterne’s in particular—discussed in the previous chapter.

shows us failed symmetry to show us that sympathy is a fantasy, etc). Contemporary scholars, I suspect, would rather not see themselves as heirs to the socially and aesthetically decorous criticism of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, they continue to emphasize the contradictions of *Frankenstein*'s failed form, for two different reasons. Either the novel is seen as the product of conservative acquiescence to the dominant ideology of its time, or its very failure is allowed to stand as a critique of that same ideology.

Gayatri Spivak, for example, calls *Frankenstein* a "flawed text," but it is precisely its flawed form, she argues, that allows readers to see the operation of two different social critiques: "the feminist dimension of the novel provides a frame that is critical of the effort to construct a creature without womb-life and infancy. But when it comes to the colonial subject's pre-history, Shelley's political imagination *fails*" (269). The novel's open epistolary frame, suggests Spivak, allows Margaret Saville, the recipient of the letters that comprise the narrative, to serve as an example of a woman who cannot be encircled or captured by a male text: "within the allegory of our reading, the place of the English lady and unnamable monster are left open by this great flawed text" (268). But for Spivak, the promise of the open form only goes so far. In terms of how the novel demonstrates social-subject production, Spivak insists that the content of *Frankenstein* does not help readers imagine the creature's history as anything other than his master's history. The very resources that produce the monster as a colonial subject in the novel—Victor's "unhallowed science," the great books about empire and civilization that the creature reads in his hovel, and the French language that he eventually learns to speak—are the same resources that taxonomically deny him a home in a shared social and

national community. “Shelley,” says Spivak, “had attempted to come to terms with the making of the colonial subject. Sympathetic, yet monstrous, clandestinely reared on sacred and profane histories of salvation and empire, shunned by the civilization that produced his subjectivity, the creature’s destructive rage propels him out of the novel into an indefinite future” (268-69). The novel stages what Spivak calls a “specular master-slave enclosure” (269). It demonstrates that the creature is enclosed within the history of Victor’s story and yet not allowed to share its future. The creature suggests something of the entrapment Spivak has in mind when he says to Victor: “Unfeeling, heartless creator! You have endowed me with perceptions and passions and then cast me abroad an object of scorn and horror of mankind” (94).

As Gayatri Spivak points out, *Frankenstein*’s framing device remains open, allowing the Creature to escape capture in the narration. She suggests that because the reader occupies the position of Margaret Saville “in the crucial sense that she must intercept the recipient function, read the letters as recipient, in order for the novel to exist. Margaret Saville does not respond to close the text as frame. The frame is thus simultaneously not a frame, and the monster can step ‘beyond the text’ and ‘be lost in darkness’” (268). Here Spivak takes up a distinctively Derridian approach to the problem of epistolary correspondence, an approach that affirms the role of the addressee over the role of the sender. In this chapter, I would like to reexamine the failure of the creature’s claim for sympathy and human connection by focusing on another kind of political possibility made available by the novel’s “failed form.” I will suggest that creature’s claim to justice might be all the more powerful for not being directly staged, more powerful for having to appear from within a superior’s language. Ultimately, I will argue

that the language and form of *Frankenstein*—as reviled on aesthetic grounds by early reviewers and seen as symptomatic of various ideological critiques by modern critics—offers an overlooked way of understanding the creature’s relationship to the human community in the novel.

There are two views of sympathy that we might find within the novel’s flawed form. The first is the more common eighteenth-century view, held by theorists such as Adam Smith: the idea that sympathy, as a theory of sensory correspondence, is delimited by a structural inability to deal with difference. This is ultimately Spivak’s perspective, and also more broadly that of Barbara Johnson, who argues that, when read allegorically, the failure of correspondence between creator and creation is an expression of the impossibility of autobiography. Victor Frankenstein’s project to create a man “like himself” demonstrates the failure of generic norms to provide an adequate form for the complexity of individual existence, particularly for female writers.² “What is at stake in Frankenstein’s workshop of filthy creation,” says Johnson, “is precisely the possibility of shaping a life in one’s own image: Frankenstein’s monster can thus be seen as the figure of autobiography as such” (243). She argues that Victor Frankenstein makes two attempts to “obey the impulse to construct an image of himself.” first, he attempts to create a being in his own image, and then, when this fails, he tries to “cover-up” or neutralize the damage by telling the story of how he came to build this other physical being. The only way the creature—whom Johnson figures as a stand-in for the question of femininity in the novel—can represent himself is in the gaps of what is not said about him. That is to say, the creature can either conform to an ideal that is someone else’s fantasy (making his

² Johnson, Barbara, “My Monster/My Self.” *Diacritics*. 12.2 (1982): 2-10.

story a “failed” autobiography), or, to return to Spivak’s reading, he inevitably finds himself excluded from the very fantasy of his inclusion.

The second view of sympathy is my own. It is to think about *Frankenstein* in terms of biography, rather than autobiography. I will argue that that it is precisely when the monstrosity of the creature’s body comes to be represented in the words of someone else that his claim for sympathy is recognized, supported and legitimated. Thus, I want to change the question we have been asking of the novel from, “can I, without accident, represent myself as a subject that corresponds to and deserves your sympathy?” (or, to paraphrase Mary Shelley, from her introduction to the second edition of the novel, “how can appendage go about telling the truth of itself?”) to a question of biography: “is it possible that the words of another person can accidentally represent and recognize me as a subject of sympathy?” In this context, it is worth noting that Shelley was also a biographer herself. Between 1832 and 1839, she wrote the biographies of many notable Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French men and a few women for Dionysius Lardner's *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*. These biographies formed part of Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, a series produced in the 1820s and 1830s in response to growing middle-class demand for self-education. Little has been written about Mary’s work as a biographer. In 2002, Nora Crook oversaw the publication, for the first time, of Mary’s *Life of William Godwin*, her lyric poetry and her writing for Lardner’s *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. In her introduction, Crook writes that Shelley “wrote with many books to hand – reading (or rereading) some, consulting others, cross-referring, interweaving abridged and paraphrased source material with her own comment” (227). In a personal letter, Shelley explained her reasons for preferring

biographical writing: "I should prefer quieter work, to be gathered from other works—such as my lives for the Cyclopedia—& which I think I do much better than romancing." By emphasizing the gathering work of biography, I would like illumine a new way of reading *Frankenstein*, a novel that many eminent critics have read as a "failed autobiography" and I would also like to offer insight into Shelley's unique practice as writer of biography in the Romantic-era of self-expression. What are the consequences, I ask, for feminist readings of her work especially, if we understand Shelley as primarily a writer of biography?

Frankenstein sets two modes of writing—autobiography and biography—in opposition to one another. In one, Victor tells his own story to Walton, using his own credibility to vouch for his authority and to expunge the humanity of the creature; in the other, Walton, a biographer, tells the stories of Victor and the creature to his sister, offering writing that speaks on behalf of a body that cannot vouch for itself. If for Johnson the challenge of a feminist reading behind Victor's autobiographical vision of writing is to resist the pressure of a dominant, masculine paradigm while struggling with the "raw materials of their own lives," then, for Walton, biographer of both monster and man, the challenge is how to avoid the accident that narrating the "raw" life of a monster will make him equal to the paradigm that the author would also set him apart from (that of man). If Victor wants to create a human being like himself, Walton's wants to write the life of a monster. Both of these endeavors fail of course, but only Walton, we shall see, stages the remarkable formal accident of realizing a human subject while trying to refute his humanity.

i. “let us change the subject”

“the different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature.”
— Victor Frankenstein

“‘Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form,’” says Victor to his creation when he first meets him on Mont Blanc. Physically enacting the concept of “blind justice,” the creature places his hands over his creator’s eyes, imploring him to “listen to him,” to “hear his tale,” to be moved and supplicated by it (66-67). The creature’s decision to appeal for sympathy from Victor using language rejects the widely held eighteenth-century faith in the gathering power of the human senses, the idea that the stuff of raw experience—pulsating, vibrating, and fluid-filled bodies—offers the most immediate, powerful and universal form of human contact available. “I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes could reply to mine...” (10), writes Walton in one of his early letters. He and Victor dream “romantically” of a friend whose love and patience might repair “faults,” who “even in a wreck,” would *appear* “attractive and amiable” (15). For them, “paper” is an inadequate basis for friendship, “a poor medium for the communication of feeling[s]” that ought to find their ground visually and physically (10). For the hideous monster, on the other hand, the materialist sensibility of the body is precisely the bulwark *against* the possibility of sympathy. Having endured the rejection of every human he has ever encountered, the creature has learned, from “dearly-bought experience”, the limitation of the physical senses for securing sympathy. When, on his first entry into human society, he is nearly stoned to death by frightened and horrified villagers, he discovers that the proximity of his body will always been seen as a threat. His form continually confirms his existence as the very “excess” of what can be conceived sympathetically through the senses. He is

“unearthly ugliness rendered...almost too horrible for human eyes,” as his creator first describes him (65). His hideous features are just too present, too local, and too visible to permit a view of him as a subject of sympathy—he cannot be “seen” as a human because he is all too physical. Like the corpses that Victor exhumes from the graveyard, the creature has a body “insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings” (30). Once brought to life, he is classified by Victor as a “filthy mass that moves and talks,” a definition notable for the emphasis it puts on the physical reality of the body—its mass and movement—ahead of the intellectual capacity for speech. Nevertheless, it is through the capacity of language that he will attempt to elicit pity from his maker.

With its fixation on the impact of the physical qualities of the creature’s body on the senses, Shelley’s novel offers a Romantic twist on Adam Smith’s claim that sympathy can only operate within the sphere of what can be known and imagined according to social and cultural custom. In *Frankenstein*, we are given the case of a creature whose foreign appearance is too forcefully real for the imagination. The creature’s predicament in the novel thus models something like the rhetorical structure of a reverse apostrophe. An apostrophe is a form of address directed to an object that cannot respond or even hear the human speech that addresses it: *Oh Rose thou art sick!* cries the speaker in William Blake’s poem to a mute flower. This cry is freighted with the expectation that the flower cannot answer the call that addresses it. In the case of Shelley’s creature, however, we have the example of a nonhuman actor (the creature) who addresses a human actor (Frankenstein, primarily) who cannot hear what the speaker says as anything other than noise from a physical body, as anything other than “uncouth and inarticulate sounds” (75)

issued from a “filthy mass” (30). Through reverse apostrophe, the object speaks, but the subject will only hear it what it says as noise.

The novel’s emphasis on the failure of speech to compensate for the derisory effects of the physical body is particularly evident in the dream Victor has about the creature shortly after he beholds the botched result of his experiment:

His jaws opened and he uttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheek. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seeming to detain me, but I escaped and rushed down the stairs...when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could have conceived. (35)

Here again Victor emphasizes the movement of the creature’s body ahead of his capacity for speech. The creature is viewed as an accident, an abomination from Victor’s original scientific blueprint. Victor wanted to create a human being with beautifully proportioned limbs, but “Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath...” (34) Preoccupied with the potential beauty of a reanimated body, Victor does not take speech into account while preparing his experiment. Indeed, the blueprint of his plan is startling for the banality of its evil: “I had worked hard for nearly two years for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (34). Victor does not name the creature, nor does he undertake any preparation for an education that might teach him how to speak and to name objects.³ In the above passage, when Victor first meets his “monster,” we see that he cannot decide whether the sounds that the creature makes are to be classified as spoken language or whether they are sheer sound: “He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seeming to detain me, but I escaped and rushed down the stairs.” It is unclear from the

³ We might thus compare the creature’s lack of a proper name with Yorick’s ability to take cover within possibilities offered by the flexibility of his own name.

sentence structure whether Victor flees the threat of the creature's body—the arms which “seem” to want to detain him—or whether he fears the potential auditory threat of the creature's voice. These sounds, if he stayed to listen to them, might be heard as language, and if they are heard as language, Victor would be put into a communicative relationship with the creature, a relationship of exchange that would demand certain responsibilities and, at the bare minimum, recognition of a shared human trait. Fleeing the room instead, Victor dismisses the possibility of a linguistic relationship between himself and his creation, appealing to Dante, a higher cultural authority, for whom, he insists, the creature would also be beyond conception.

But the creature already understands that his physical presence bars him from being received as anything other than an object of horror. He realizes that his only hope for human sympathy is to be found in the ability of words to cancel the estranging effect of his appearance. His situation is analogous to that of Yorick in *A Sentimental Journey* who attempts to live a sentimental life as a stranger in France relying solely on the sensations of his body but finds himself having to give a linguistic account of himself as an English “friend” to the King. Like Yorick, Shelley's creature comes to understand that immediate, fluid, and automatic exchanges between two bodies threaten to produce monsters rather than pitiful human subjects. Just as Sterne's man of feeling must resort to narrative to compensate for his foreign presence in France, the creature turns to language to forestall the terror that results from the sight of his appearance⁴:

...for I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become master of their

⁴ And like the impartial spectator in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* who understands “impartiality” to exist only narrowly in a sphere circumscribed by language, kinship and nationality, Mary Shelley's creature comes to understand that an immediate, fluid, and automatic exchange between two bodies might just as easily produce a monster as it could a pitiful human subject.

language; which knowledge might enable to make me overlook the deformity of my figure; for with this also the contrast perpetually presented itself to my eyes had made me acquainted (76)

The creature's observation that becoming a "master" of a "foreign" language might blind others to his appearance is confirmed all the more strongly after he discovers that Safie, a young Turkish girl, has been received as guest in the household of cottagers he has been secretly observing from a hovel in the woods. Like Safie, the creature has been cast out by his father and left to seek "asylum" with strangers. Discerning that the religious difference between the Christian De Lacey family and Safie's Turkish family are overcome by the family's cosmopolitan spirit of "benevolence and generosity," the creature becomes hopeful that he might also solicit the sympathy of her host family: "benevolence and generosity were ever present before me, inciting within me a desire to become an actor in the busy scene where so many admirable qualities were called forth and displayed" (85). Sensible, however, that his physical appearance will not allow him to receive hospitality as readily as Safie—in sharp contrast to his "horrid form," she has "a countenance of angelic beauty and expression... her features of regular proportion, and her complexion wondrously fair"—the creature decides to delay a presentation of himself until he can make an appeal in language, casting himself in the meanwhile as a supplementary student of her cottage-room education (78). From an open window he secretly listens in on Safie's language and history lessons. Little does the De Lacey family know that as they educate and indoctrinate a young Turkish girl into the history of "civilization," they also aid and abet a fugitive to linguistic and historical self-consciousness.

As a secret classmate of Safie, the creature learns to speak, read and write. It is, however, quite by accident that he encounters his first book. One day, the creature finds a “leathern portmanteau” containing clothes and books such as *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch’s *Lives* and the *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Shelley never reveals the owner of this portmanteau (this is in keeping with the other traditions of accidental possession that I have outlined in previous chapters). For example, if Sterne’s Yorick was concerned about losing his own portmanteau to the French king, and if Pamela received access to books as part of a fortune attached to her domestic position (her education becoming reflexive of the manners of her mistress), Shelley’s creature is the recipient of an accidental gift from an unknown donor. “Fortunately” (as the creature says) the owner of this portmanteau speaks the same foreign language—French—that he has been learning vicariously through Safie. This is a trope, of course. For Jacques Ranciere, the topos of the “saved manuscript,” the “found manuscript,” or “first encounter with writing” is a primordial fable of how the ignorant come to understand themselves as capable of reading: “the topos of the found book—even of the book in pieces—proper to novelistic fancy is transformed into a social fable of the entry into writing” (*Mute Speech*, 90). As Ranciere also suggests, speaking of the trope as it explodes into political importance for nineteenth-century worker’s literature, “this entry into writing is not only the cause of the perdition of a few unhappy souls; it also disturbs the order that destines the men of tools to the regulated works of the tool and the men of thought to the nights of thinking” (91). The accidental and chance quality of the encounter with the found book is important for understanding the political implications of social entry enabled by these volumes. The creature, while not exactly a man intended for labor, has been restricted by his creator to

the purpose of no-purpose; he is meant solely to embody the life that Victor animates in him. When he collects the leathern portmanteau from the ground, he aborts this purpose, taking up discourse that he was never meant to collect.

Many studies of Shelley's novel have traced the relationship between the depiction of the creature's cottage-room education and Rousseau's natural man. Yet, while the parallels are certainly apparent, and have been amply documented by David Marshall and others, it must be emphasized that the creature does not learn to read and write by accident in a state of nature.⁵ He is not a natural savant, clever only by virtue of his own capacities until corrupted by the introduction of human society. From the very beginning of his existence, the creature is sullied by civil society. He is "created" by a concatenation of human body parts, in the first instance and, later, leant language by the very society that will reject him as a monster. The creature *finds* books; they are not a conscious "gift" that indoctrinates and "encloses" him as colonial subject (as Spivak has suggested). Rather, the creature's books are the basis of an education *that nobody has planned that he should have, and which nobody expects him to be capable of having*.

What is immediately notable about the creature's connection to language and learning in the novel is that he comes to speak in public using knowledge he is not supposed to possess, let alone be entitled to articulate. And this illegal knowledge becomes the basis from which he builds a case for sympathy from the human community. In this way, the creature's ability to speak language—and the French language in particular—does more to confuse his identity than easily cast him as a Rousseauvian savant. This confusion is

⁵ See especially Brooks, Peter "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts: Language and Monstrosity in Frankenstein", *New Literary History* 9 (3): 591–605 as well as David Marshall's chapter length focus on the topic of language and epistemology in *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*.

particularly evident when the creature finally emerges from his secret hovel to engage the blind eldest member of the De Lacey family in a conversation:

By your language, stranger, I suppose you are my countryman; -- are you French?’

‘No; but I was educated by a French family, and understand that language only. I am now going to claim the protection of some friends whom I sincerely love, and of whose favour I have some hope.’

‘Are they Germans?’

‘No, they are French. But *let us change the subject*. I am an unfortunate and deserted creature; I look around, and I have no relation or friend upon earth. These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me, and know little of me. I am full of fears; for if I fail there, I am an outcast in the world for ever’ (76)

The creature’s claim for sympathy from the old man has none of the ire and brashness that characterizes his use of language with his encounter with Victor Frankenstein on Mont Blanc.⁶ His request to “change the subject” from the language he speaks to the fact of his desertion and loneliness is more supplicatory than revolutionary. It is not a bold or declaratory utterance, and, ultimately, its ability to be convincing depends on the old man’s blindness to his hideous appearance. It is an appeal for a joint project (“let us”), a collaborative venture, rather than an individual demand or claim for recognition. Though obvious to the reader, it is not clear to old man De Lacey that he is one of the “friends” to whom the creature directs his claim for protection. In order to effect kindness for himself as a stranger, the creature appeals to the old man in the language of one of his “countrym[e]n.” To request the protection and sympathy owing to a creature “with no friend on earth,” he categorically addresses his would-be protectors as already “friends whom [he] sincerely loves.” To be sure, this strategy is something of a rhetorical ploy, depending on the inversion of the associations (friend and stranger, or friend and enemy)

⁶ Speaking language reminiscent of the 1789 *Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen*, the creature’s first address to Victor is loudly legalistic: “The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defense before they are condemned” (67).

that determine the identity of individuals as much as on the old man's physical blindness: "By your language, stranger, I suppose you are my countryman; --are you French?" Like Yorick when asked by the magistrate if he is "jesting" about his passport, the creature cannot claim to be French by way of birth or naturalization. But by speaking in the French language, and *only* the French language, the creature disorganizes the deductive logic that leads the old man to make smooth equations between language, national identity and friendship. He displays the arbitrariness of the disjunction that denies a speaker of a language membership in its corresponding national community. As the creature's conversation strategy here emphasizes, national communities are predicated—indeed named after—the ability of their members to speak a certain language. In making this primary connection between community and language evident, the creature forges a link between the subject of national and social belonging (a subject he is not supposed to be a "subject" of) and the subject of himself as a "stranger" without a home or community in the world. He reveals that there is no authorial reasoning that could comfortably exclude his being from a community with rules of membership determined by language.

The change of subject requested by the creature is therefore not so much a change of perspective or a turn in the direction of the conversation, what might be defined in the dictionary as "to make radically different." The creature does not want to hasten the old man away from a discussion of how friends and countrymen might be identified by their language—"Are they Germans?"—to an entirely new topic, his own desertion and homelessness. Rather, the purpose of the "change of subject," as the creature initiates it, is to forge a connection, or transference, between two terms, "friend" and "stranger,"

which are supposed to be antithetical.⁷ In figurative terminology, he displaces the metaphorical logic of sympathy—the idea that the perception of likeness between two terms determines their membership together—to the logic of metonymy, where meaning is transferred and resemblance devised “on the basis of associations that develop out of specific contexts rather than from participation in a structure of meaning” (McLaughlin, 83). If, in the context of his conversation with the old man, the creature can substantiate himself as already “friend” by way of language, in what sense could the old man, or anybody else, retroactively reject him as a “stranger?” Implicating himself in a language he does not have the official right to speak, the creature stages a scene with old man De Lacey that requires readers to reevaluate the connection between language and sympathy.

ii. “*something in your words...*”

Intellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence. This does not signify the equal value of all manifestations of intelligence, but the self-quality of intelligence separated by a gulf. There are not two sorts of intelligence separated by a gulf. The human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to venture into the forest of things and signs surrounding it, so as to take its place among human beings: by observing and comparing one thing with another

– Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*

The incongruity between the proper and improper use of the French language in the scene between the old man and the creature has the advantage of opening Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* up to broader questions about what it means to be a “subject” of feeling in language and in literature. On the one hand, the creature’s interview with the old man suggests the impossibility of autobiography, the impossibility of his coming to speak

⁷ Both of these definitions—to become *different* and to change or channel the *same*—are evident in standard dictionary definitions of the verb “to change.” (1. to make different in some particular, to make radically different, to give a different position, course, or direction to, to replace with another, to make a shift from one to another; and 2. to exchange for an equivalent sum of money, to pass from one phase to another, to shift one’s means of conveyance, to transfer, to undergo transformation, transition, or substitution, to pass from the possession of one owner to that of another...).

directly for himself as a person worthy of sympathetic reception. And yet, on the other, he hopes that his use of a shared (albeit “stolen”) language will overpower the foreignizing effect of his physical appearance:

I had sagacity enough to discover, that the unnatural hideousness of my person was the chief object of horror with those who had formerly beheld me. My voice, although harsh, had nothing terrible in it; I thought, therefore, that if, in the absence of his children, I could gain the good-will and *mediation* of the old De Lacey, I might, *by his means* be tolerated by my younger protectors (89 emphasis mine).

After the creature tells the blind old man that he fears his “friends” (who are not yet “friends”) will be “prejudiced” against his appearance (“where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster”), the old man argues that physical appearance should be a false qualifier for determining the worthiness of an individual’s claim to sympathy (90). The old man therefore offers to help represent the creature to the rest of his family:

‘If you unreservedly confide to me the particulars of your tale, I perhaps may be of use in undeceiving them. I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is *something in your words* which persuades me that you are sincere.’... ‘Excellent man! I thank you... You raise me from the dust by this kindness; and I trust that, by your aid, I shall not be driven from society and sympathy of your fellow-creatures.’ (91 emphasis mine)

In old man De Lacey, the creature seeks a quasi-Adamic “raising from the dust.” He seeks to be born again in someone else’s language. Recognizing that he cannot make his own appeal directly, he looks to the old man to “mediate” his case to the wider community (“I might, by his means, be tolerated”), just as he hinges the success of an introduction to the De Lacey family on the reduplication of language lessons intended only for Safie. The creature will “unreservedly” confide or confess the details of his story to the old man. Yet this story can only be “undeceived”—authorized and authenticated to

a wider community—by the old man himself who, ostensibly, lends its words his own credibility and thereby “undeceives” it for his family. It is thus neither the pitiful details of the creature’s story that determine whether he will receive sympathy from the old man, nor the feelings his words might arouse in his listener. It is, instead, the ability of the old man to authenticate and vouchsafe the existence of the creature in language to the rest of the De Lacey family.

It might well be argued that linguistic inbreeding of this kind cannot save the creature from the old man’s family. As all readers of *Frankenstein* know, the plot ushers in the creature’s doom faster than it stays to hear to his story. At precisely the moment that the old man seems poised to accept the creature’s account, agreeing to make a plea on his behalf, his children enter the cottage and immediately chase the creature away, battering him with sticks. Upon seeing the “monster” in the cottage with their father, Felix and Agatha do not pause to quibble over the meaning of words. The creature’s request for sympathy is, in this very immediate sense, a failure. There has been no barrier to protect his words from in his body. For the remainder of the novel he is left to live “unperceived” in woods until he takes it upon himself to violently revenge himself on his creator, killing his brother, best friend, and fiancée. He then jumps overboard from a ship sailing to Antarctica, lost to “darkness and distance” forever (156).

We thus might agree with Spivak and Johnson that because the creature is dependent on the words and categorizations of other people to broadcast his own story about being a French-speaking foreigner and motherless being, he cannot satisfyingly register the contradiction of his identity in language. Yet there is a way in which the creature’s address has not completely failed. When he speaks to old man De Lacey, the

creature reveals the meanings that can be *transferred* when the very terms that determine the use of language are occupied by persons who are not supposed to be in possession of them. I would like to suggest that the creature's use of a language not intended for him stages his membership in the old man's linguistic and political communities at precisely the same moment that it reveals his vulnerability to these groups. "There is something in your words that convinces me that you are sincere," says old man De Lacey to the creature. Perhaps in the creature's voice the old man hears the virtuous principles he has imparted to Safie, redoubling his own good sense of what constitutes a subject worthy of sympathy. Interestingly, however, the estranging effect that the creature's words have on the old man lead to another supposition: when words become ambiguous, when they resonate to the old man from a familiar, yet unknown authority, when they become "something" rather than precisely one "thing," they can be seen as open and available to anybody for occupation. By way of this "thing," truth and sincerity become extended and attached to the anonymous prefix "some," a prefix that changes the particular identity of a thing into a generality, just as the particularity of the "thing" lends to the "some" a frame of reference by which it might be recognized. The word "something" is thus a word that transforms what one particular person says into "something" anybody might say.⁸

This "logic of metonymy" (which is also the logic of biography) is also on display in the creature's first interview with Victor Frankenstein. To Victor the creature is a

⁸ The creature's use of words with old man De Lacey also functions as an example of sublime language found objectionable by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful*:

W]ords, by having no application, ought to be inoperative; but when words commonly sacred to great occasions are used, we are affected by them even without the occasions... When words which have been generally so applied are put together without any rational view, or in such a manner that they do not rightfully agree with each other, the stile is called bombast. And it requires in several cases much good sense and experience to be guarded against the force of such language; for when propriety is neglected, a greater number of these affecting words may be taken into the service, and a greater variety may be indulged in combining them. (88)

“figure of super human speed,” a being of “unearthly ugliness,” and a sight “too horrible for human eyes” (and thus not “semblable”). But more than this horrid appearance, Victor is frightened by the discovery that the creature has a voice that demonstrates not only his human capacity for language, but also his understanding of abstract ideas, particularly the concept of justice:

Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defense before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would with a satisfied conscience destroy your own creature. Oh praise the eternal justice of man. (67)

The metonymy performed by the creature in this passage is best described by what Hannah Arendt calls, in her analysis of the situation of stateless persons after the Second World War, a claim for *a right to have rights*. This claim is structured as a paradox: how can a “monster” who cannot be recognized as a human being demand a legal right that is itself premised on his recognition as human being? (67) The creature cannot be seen as a man and thus there is no reason to think that he is a holder of legal rights. The constable whom Victor approaches to arrest and arraign the creature says as much:

“I would willingly afford you every aid in your pursuit; but the creature of whom you speak appears to have powers which would put all my exertions to defiance. Who can follow an animal which can traverse the sea of ice, and inhabit caves and dens where no man would venture to intrude? Besides, some months have elapsed since the commission of his crimes, and no one can conjecture to what place he has wandered, or what region he may now inhabit” (139).

The creature is a criminal and an “animal” at the same time; he is, therefore, an impossible subject (Arendt herself says that it is better to be a criminal than a free dog with no name). Yet the creature stages the contradictions of these identities, forging a link to humanity for himself, when he speaks to Frankenstein based on a right to human

justice he supposedly does not have—"the guilty," he notes, "are allowed by the rights of human justice to speak in defense of themselves." Effectively, the creature challenges Victor with a logic that is similar to the logic employed with De Lacey: if you and the constable can call me a murderer, then you have already admitted that I am a human since only human laws can make murderers, and therefore by calling me a murderer you admit I am human, and since I am human you are obligated to assist me, to defend me, to protect me. Of course, the claim's logic will not be heard: it is mere noise. It fails here just as it failed to secure him asylum with the old man's children. Fairly soon after promising to make the creature a companion so that he might not be forever alone, Victor abandons his agreement, destroying the half-made up body. At the end of the novel, the creature is seen receding into the distance, alone. His final words are: "I shall collect my funeral pile and consume to ashes *this miserable frame*, that its remains may afford no light to any curious and unhallowed wretch who would create such another as I have been." The creature says his remains shall have no light. He will leave no record of himself. Though he represents himself as a friend and as a subject of rights, his claims fails because neither Victor nor De Lacey are able to act as his external guarantor. They cannot "recompense" him, as he says at one point, by representing his speech and his story to the larger community as equivalent with to those of other human beings. The creature needs a person who will convert what he says as an isolated individual into something that anybody might say and everyone can hear. This person must be a third person who, unlike De Lacey, can shield his words from the physical referent of his body.

iv. “as of a human voice...”

...There came a day when I had learned to read with the eyes, without hearing, without spelling out the words, and then the whole nature of literature was transformed.

--Paul Valery

The creature's metonymical logic, his attempt to convert what one person says into something that anybody might say, fails with De Lacey's family, but does it fail with those who read it with their eyes in writing? Let me now explain the metonymical or biographical logic at work in the novel's framing of the creature's voice. Just as the creature is concatenated out of various body parts, it is well known that Mary Shelley assembled *Frankenstein* from a variety of literary techniques and genres: the confessional structure of the Godwinian novel, the historical narration of Walter Scott, and the physiological and fantastic mechanisms associated with the Gothic novel. Shelley's journals reference a number of literary works she was reading either before or during the composition of *Frankenstein*, many of which might be thought of as possible influences for the framed narrative form of her novel. Between 1815 and 1816, Mary read all three of Richardson's epistolary novels, first *Clarissa*, then *Pamela* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. In 1817, she read a French translation of *Arabian Nights*, famous for its framed form. She also, of course, read Plutarch's *Lives*, which would become a holding in the creature's woodland library. Another of her literary sources notable for its framing structure was Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, to which Captain Walton attributes his fascination “with the dangerous mysteries of the ocean.” This poem is alluded to several times in the novel, most prominently when Victor quotes a stanza while dazedly wandering in nature after bringing the creature to life. Shelley also read Charles Brockden Brown's epistolary novel *Wieland, or the Transformation* (itself heavily influenced by her father's *Caleb Williams*), and may have found in it an important source

for her frame structure, as well as a thematic concern for the “monstrosity” of imitated speech. Told from the perspective of a woman named Clara, *Wieland* tells the story of famous ventriloquist whose mimicking of human voices causes those who hear them to commit murder.

But what is perhaps without precedent, certainly in terms of genre classification, is Shelley’s combination of a biographical and epistolary frame narrative.⁹ *Frankenstein* is composed of letters written by Captain Robert Walton to his sister Margaret Saville in England. These letters tell three different stories: Walton’s firsthand account in English of his experience as the captain of an arctic exploration, Victor Frankenstein’s confession to Walton, also in English, of his hideous laboratory creation, and the creature’s tale of his abandonment and autodidactic education, told to his maker in what we must presume to be French, the only language that he ever mentions being able to speak. Victor relays both the tale of his scientific labor and his interview with the creature to Walton after the Englishman has rescued him from an ice floe in the North Pole. Walton, in turn, compiles both stories in one long letter to his sister dated between August 19th and August 26th 17-- . All three histories are delivered with the first-person pronoun, but only Walton’s account is initially written, rather than spoken. Why does Walton decide to write all of these stories? He says that he transcribes them for the “pleasure” of this sister, but he also requests that his sister save the letters as a “record” of a story he might reread for

⁹ In his magisterial *The Secret History of Domesticity*, Michael McKeon works with a distinction between public/private narration methods that I will use provisionally here: epistolary form offers access to the “secret” and private life of a writer whereas third-person narration is a public method of passing commentary or judgment. In many ways, however, McKeon notes that third-person narration can provide even more private knowledge than the first person “I” since an outside narrator can always convey ulterior and interior motives that are unavailable to an epistolary speaker. But what do we make of an epistolary method that does not profess to offer unadorned, private or firsthand information? A method that does not use writing in the third-person or in free-indirect style, a method that is simply indirect; the first-person pronoun delivered by another speaker in a narrative form akin to biography?

“interest and sympathy” in the future (17). Walton’s reportage is not immune from embellishment or the errors of memory; it is by no means an unmediated transcription. Indeed, he makes no attempt to disguise his role as an interpreter, as he tells his sister plainly: “I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his [Frankenstein’s] own words, what he has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes” (17). Despite Walton’s narrative “resolve,” we cannot be sure that his written words correspond exactly with Frankenstein’s story. We cannot be sure when he makes notes instead of exact statements, nor can we detect the moments in the narrative when he has stopped being engaged with his subject. So while *Frankenstein* ostensibly depicts the autobiographies of three men, two of these autobiographies are conveyed indirectly in a form that is more biographical. The creature’s story, furthermore, is doubly mediated. If we must take it on faith that Walton records Frankenstein’s story “as nearly as possible,” we must also trust the accuracy of Frankenstein’s memory of his encounter with the creature at Montanvert. The creature’s story, therefore, comes to us as a copy of a copy. It does not profess faithfulness to any source, a point to which I will return to below.

Why does Shelley use Walton, to borrow Peter Brooks’ phrase, as the novel’s ““initial and ultimate narrator””? (591) In the first place, Walton’s relationship to Victor creates a valuable third perspective that allows readers to see the hypocrisy of Victor’s refusal to extend sympathy and community to his creation.¹⁰ The novel begins with Captain Walton celebrating the values of friendship with Victor Frankenstein. Finding the men aboard his ship lacking in sensitivity, Walton laments in a letter to his sister that he craves sympathy with someone not yet present to him: “I desire the company of a man

¹⁰ Brooks, 592.

who could sympathize with me, whose eyes could reply to mine” (18). When he rescues Victor and takes him aboard his ship, he confesses to Victor, “I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who could sympathize with me and love me” (201). And after hearing the harrowing tale of Victor’s sordid laboratory creation and the trail of destruction that ensues in the wake of its coming to life, he further remarks: “[Victor’s] eloquence is forcible and touching; nor can I hear him, when he relates a pathetic incident or endeavours to move the passions of pity or love, without tears” (200).

The sympathy that Walton seeks with Victor is furthermore not based on a correspondence of their persons. It seems to flourish despite their differences of nationality, education, and class.¹¹ Walton refers to Victor as a “stranger,” and he mentions that he feels very much inferior to him: “I am self-educated, and perhaps I hardly rely sufficiently upon my own powers. I wish therefore that my companion should be wiser and more experienced than myself, to confirm and support me...” (16). The sympathetic friendship between Victor and Walton cannot be conceived as one predicated on precise or mimetic resemblance. Walton admits that he has been self-educated and that Victor’s friendship might correct his faults. The sympathy desired by Walton is depicted as a relationship of co-dependency and collaboration, which is in parallel to the relationships that the creature wishes to have with Victor and old man De Lacey. But it is clear that Victor’s “strangeness” does not impede Walton’s love, in the way that the creature’s physical ugliness blocks every path to friendship. And thus the unavoidable irony for readers is that the creature, whose desire for sympathy and co-dependence

¹¹ Walton’s class position is debatable. We know that his education was “neglected,” and that his dying father forbade him from entering the “sea-faring life.” But after “inheriting” a fortune from his Uncle, he eschews wealth to become a “common sailor,” working himself up from the class of “undermate” to that of Captain, much as Victor advanced in his education at Ingolstadt (8).

echoes Walton's own desire for friendship with Victor, and who requires from Victor the same protection and education, is excluded from the chain of friendship and love. Though the creature insists that he is "fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy," and though he easily finds himself in sympathetic agreement with the De Lacey family, whom he watches in secret from a hovel ("when they were happy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced I sympathized with their joys..."), he is roundly refused sympathy by every character in the novel, with the temporary exception of old man De Lacey (208).

Yet, in addition to ironizing Victor's relationship to the creature, Walton's position as the master narrator also formally secures the possibility of a sympathetic relationship. Walton records the creature's story for posterity. As he says,

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. 'Since you have preserved my narration,' said he, 'I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.'

It is important to recognize that Walton does not write the creature's story out of any regard for fairness or political equality. Here he refers to him as an "enemy." Like Victor Frankenstein, Walton thinks the creature is less than human. While writing his final letter to his sister, for instance, Walton describes being interrupted by the sudden appearance of the creature in his cabin. Switching to the present tense, he writes: "I am interrupted. What do these sounds portend? It is midnight; the breeze blows fairly, and the watch on the deck scarcely stir. Again; there is *a sound as of a human voice*, but hoarser" (emphasis mine 152). Shortly after he writes about the mysterious human-like "sounds" (the "sounds" as of a human "voice"), Walton goes on to record the creature's parting words to his creator: "Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! What

does it avail that I now ask thee pardon?" Walton's narration here rushes onwards, breathless and seemingly unadulterated, giving us the impression that it is artless. But the reader cannot avoid detecting a gap between Walton's perception of the creature's mysterious human-like "sounds" and the eloquent presentation he then gives of the creature's final words to his creator. Regretfully for Walton, readers cannot hear these "sounds." Unlike the Wedding Guest in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," who "cannot choose but hear" the story he is told, readers of Walton's narrative cannot hear the "noises" they are told to hear. In writing, Walton simply has no way of representing or demonstrating his perception of the creature's vocal difference from other humans. He cannot articulate sonic difference; he can only weakly suggest it through the analogy of the "as if." And so, by narrating the creature in the same language and mode as Victor Frankenstein, Walton cancels their differences at the level of narrative. Whether he wants to or not, he cannot avoid equalizing the creature's voice with Frankenstein's, even at the very moment that he wants to express its inhumanity.

In the blindness occasioned by writing, Walton unwittingly frames the creature as a human being equal to the very community that refuses to have him as a member. In attempting to tell the story of the doomed and unequal relationship between Victor and the creature, Walton cannot help converting the uncanny timbre of the creature's "inhuman" voice into relatable and readable language. By sparing his sister (who occupies the position of the reader) the sight of his physical appearance, Walton makes obvious the creature's equivalence to his creator in language: he puts both of their worlds into one. Claims for political rights, it is worth noting, make similar demonstrations of equality. Rights are *not* about claiming or demanding a property we already effectively

have (Why bother demanding something we already possess?). Using the language of rights is about staging a dispute, igniting a challenging logic that lets others see a common world in which the recognition of rights cannot be denied. We saw in Chapter Two that Pamela makes precisely a claim of this sort when she challenges Mr. B to see her not as a false princess, but as a peasant girl who is entitled to the same narrative space as a princess. And the logic was even more present in Yorick's use of Shakespeare to equivocate the meaning of his name and identity, making it impossible to separate the truth from the jest and thereby letting himself pass as a "naturalized foreigner."

Jonathan Culler argues that frames are devices of "naturalization" that allow unfamiliar texts and scripts to be brought "into relation with a type of discourse or model which is already, in some sense, natural and legible" (138). Unlike the Russian Formalist concept of "estrangement," a naturalizing frame makes something that seems strange and puzzling in the text fit in with the knowledge and perceptions we already have of our existence. Monica Fludernik re-interprets Culler's word "naturalization" as "narrativization" to suggest "that process of naturalization which enables readers to recognize as narrative those kinds of texts that appear to be non-narrative according to either to natural parameters...or the cultural parameters..."¹² Both of these definitions apply to the frame structure of *Frankenstein*. Walton frames the story of the creature and Victor in a way that allows readers to "naturalize" and accept the "monster" as a sympathetic human being according to the discourses of nationality and friendship that are natural for the characters in the novel. And, further, Walton's narration makes it possible to identify what Victor de-signifies as "noise" as relatable human language, enabling readers to recognize narrative in what they are not to hear and see as non-

¹² See Monika Fludernik, *Towards A 'Natural' Narratology*. (London: Routledge, 1996) 33-34.

narrative. By allowing the creature to appear in the guise of his writing, and later, in the biography that his letters will complete, Walton provides a frame that makes the creature legible in language—precisely the kind of mediation the creature desired from old man De Lacey. He also gives the creature a historical identity, even though the creature does not have the right to one based on birth or nationality. Walton speaks of his letters as a collection that will, once united, form a “record” for the future. This record is not just any record; it is an archive created “for sympathy and interest.” In the future, this supposes, sympathy will be the practice of reading and interpreting rather than the spontaneity of sense perception.

v. *a record for the future...*

‘Since you have preserved my narration,’ said he, ‘I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.’” – Captain Walton, *Frankenstein*.

Walton’s narrative framing of three disparate stories thus provides an alternative answer to the question left dangling by the creature at the end of the novel: “in what should I seek for sympathy?” Walton says he writes the stories of Victor and the creature because he wants to create a “record” for the future. Many critics have viewed the ending of novel as the ultimate confirmation of the creature’s failure to become a realized subject; in Spivak’s terminology, the creature is condemned to be “without history” rather than in “national history.”¹³ But when we begin to see how Mary Shelley frames sympathy in narrative, our measure of sympathy’s success and failure in the novel takes a radical turn, and so does the success or failure of the creature’s claim for recognition. What

¹³ “Shelley,” says Spivak, “had attempted to come to terms with the making of the colonial subject. Sympathetic, yet monstrous, clandestinely reared on sacred and profane histories of salvation and empire, shunned by the civilization that produced his subjectivity, the creature’s destructive rage propels him out of the novel into an indefinite future...” (268-69).

distinguishes Mary Shelley's presentation of sympathy in the novel *Frankenstein* from more pessimistic or parodic accounts of it, is not so much her presentation of how sympathy forfeits itself to the framing devices and referents of language, or how it offers a view of immediacy that inevitably fails to strike and arouse the emotions of the viewer, but how a kind of equality comes to be staged precisely by way of these failures and indirections—above all, in the way a biographer speaks on behalf of a subject he has no feelings for.

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